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# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**KURT VON SCHLEICHER—THE SOLDIER AND  
POLITICS IN THE RUN-UP TO NATIONAL SOCIALISM:  
A CASE STUDY OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS**

by

Alexander B. Bitter

June 2013

Thesis Co-Advisors:

Donald Abenheim  
Carolyn Halladay

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TO NATIONAL SOCIALISM: A CASE STUDY OF CIVIL-MILITARY  
RELATIONS**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis analyzes the political role of the German General Staff as well as civil-military relations in Germany from the late 19th century until 1933. Specifically, it examines the rise and fall of Kurt von Schleicher. Together with Generals Paul von Hindenburg, Erich Ludendorff, and Wilhelm Groener, Schleicher shaped the politics of the Weimar Republic, right up to the end that he—unintentionally—hastened when his intrigues paved the way for Adolf Hitler’s dictatorship.

During World War I, the German army completed its control over the civilian administration and bureaucracy. In the Republic of Weimar 1919–1933, the military remained a powerful governmental player—as the self-anointed protector of the nation against external and internal threats, including democracy.

Thus, Germany’s political situation in the winter of 1932–1933 and the activities of the key players stemmed from a long-term anti-democratic socialization process amid an entrenched civil-military imbalance. As the present thesis demonstrates, Schleicher’s life—from his military background to his experience as a member of Prussia’s noble Junker class—coincided with Germany’s tumultuous modernization. The fateful lessons that he drew from this experience ultimately spelled the end of Germany’s first democracy and ushered in the calamity of the Third Reich.



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>THE GENERAL STAFF AND ITS INFLUENCE IN GERMAN POLITICS AND SOCIETY.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>MILITARY AND POLITICS: ALSO A 21ST-CENTURY ISSUE .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>A BROAD SPECTRUM OF SCHOLARSHIP .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>D.</b>	<b>TWO STORY LINES: GERMANY’S POLITICS AND SCHLEICHER’S WORLD.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>MASS POLITICS AND THE SOLDIER IN GERMANY AFTER 1848: AN AUTHORITARIAN MODERNIZATION .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>THE PERPETUAL SUPPRESSION OF DEMOCRACY .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>GERMANY’S UNIFICATION THROUGH WAR.....</b>	<b>16</b>
1.	Setting the Stage with Denmark and Austria.....	17
2.	The Main Event: France .....	18
<b>C.</b>	<b>CONSOLIDATION OF POWER AFTER 1871.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>D.</b>	<b>SOCIETY, ECONOMY, AND INDUSTRIALIZATION .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>AN EXAMPLARY OFFICER’S CAREER: KURT VON SCHLEICHER’S POLITICAL AND MILITARY SOCIALIZATION IN IMPERIAL GERMANY .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>THE WORLD OF KURT VON SCHLEICHER.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>THE MAKING OF AN OFFICER AND MILITARY TECHNOCRAT .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>WORLD WAR I AND SCHLEICHER’S MENTORS.....</b>	<b>32</b>
1.	Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff.....	32
2.	Wilhelm Groener .....	37
<b>D.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>POLITICS AFTER THE WAR AND THE BIRTH OF THE YOUNG DEMOCRACY—REICHSWEHR AND REPUBLIC .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>WEIMAR AND ITS (EARLY) DISCONTENTS .....</b>	<b>43</b>
1.	Difficult Economic Conditions.....	44
2.	Domestic Political Rivalries .....	46
<b>B.</b>	<b>CONSTITUTIONAL WEAKNESSES .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN WEIMAR AND SCHLEICHER’S INCREASING POLITICAL INFLUENCE.....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>THE ROLE OF THE GENERAL STAFF IN THE SHADOW OF WEIMAR AND VERSAILLES 1919–1933.....</b>	<b>54</b>
1.	Seeckt’s Leadership in State and Army.....	56
2.	Groener’s Vision .....	58
<b>B.</b>	<b>SCHLEICHER’S POLITICAL ACTIVITIES .....</b>	<b>60</b>
1.	Schleicher Barges in Politics .....	62
2.	Schleicher and Hindenburg .....	63

3.	Schleicher and Groener .....	64
C.	THE RISE OF THE NATIONALSOZIALISTISCHE DEUTSCHE ARBEITERPARTEI (NSDAP).....	66
D.	CONCLUSION .....	68
VI.	SCHLEICHER'S CHANCELLORSHIP PAVES THE WAY FOR HITLER...71	
A.	SCHLEICHER'S COOPERATION WITH HITLER .....	73
B.	TAKING OFFICE FROM FRANZ VON PAPEN .....	74
C.	CORNERSTONES OF SCHLEICHER'S GOVERNMENT .....	75
1.	Schleicher's Official and Secret Goals .....	75
2.	The Failure of Georg Strasser and Schleicher's Querfront (Divide and Conquer) Strategy .....	77
3.	The Onslaught of the Interest Groups .....	78
D.	THE CHANCELLOR'S MAJOR GOAL: STATE OF EMERGENCY ..79	
E.	PAPEN AND HITLER DEFEAT SCHLEICHER .....	81
VII.	CONCLUSION AND WARNINGS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY .....	85
A.	SCHLEICHER'S RESPONSIBILITY .....	85
B.	CONSEQUENCES FOR GERMANY AND THE <i>BUNDESWEHR</i> .....	87
C.	OUTLOOK.....	90
	APPENDIX A. THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC'S CABINETS .....	91
	APPENDIX B. <i>REICHSTAG</i> ELECTIONS RESULTS OF THE NSDAP .....	93
	APPENDIX C. NUMBER OF UNEMPLOYED GERMANS .....	95
	APPENDIX D. GERMANY'S FOREIGN TRADE.....	97
	LIST OF REFERENCES .....	99
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....	109

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My thesis advisors' profound knowledge of German history guided my own research and informed the whole thesis process. Dr. Carolyn Halladay also provided excellent editorial support, and I owe both remarkable scholars a debt of gratitude.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

On 30 June 1934, Kurt von Schleicher, a general as well as a former chancellor of Germany, and his wife were assassinated in their home—by governmental order. They were victims of the so-called Night of the Long Knives that Adolf Hitler initiated to settle scores and eliminate rivals who might endanger his monopoly hold on political power in Germany as well as his absolute leadership in the Nazi party. Managed by the Nazi leaders Hermann Göring, Heinrich Himmler, and Reinhard Heydrich, days of bloody violence placed the final seal on Hitler's dictatorship.

Schleicher was accused of cooperating with foreign powers—namely with the French ambassador in Berlin, André François-Poncet. He also was alleged to have conspired with Ernst Röhm, the head of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA), to effect the putsch (*Röhm-Putsch*) at the heart of the trumped up “justifications” for these political murders.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Nazis circulated a false rumor that Schleicher had resisted arrest by using a weapon and, therefore, had to be shot. The seven bullet wounds on his body demonstrated that, in fact, a brutal assassination had occurred.<sup>2</sup>

In many ways, Schleicher was the architect of his own fate; as a soldier-politician, he contributed meaningfully to the demise of Germany's first democracy and the rise of Hitler—though he intended neither outcome. Indeed, like many of his fellow aristocratic officers in and out of uniform in the Weimar Republic, Schleicher surely thought his governmental machinations, including his relentless efforts to limit or roll back democracy, were in the best interests of the German nation. His fateful misperceptions owe to the world of ideas and outlooks in which he came of age—and the civil-military imbalance that characterized Germany in Schleicher's time and place. His personality, character, and thinking were a result of a long-term socialization process from his

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, Schleicher had not seen the SA head in a year, and François-Poncet stated later that he had no indications that the former chancellor planned any kind of plot. (Heinz Höhne, “Mordsache Röhm,” *Der Spiegel*, 26 (25 June 1984), <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-13509574.html>, accessed May 29, 2013.)

<sup>2</sup> Heinz Höhne, “Mordsache Röhm,” *Der Spiegel*, 26 (25 June 1984), <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-13509574.html>, accessed May 29, 2013.

experience in the German military and its General Staff in the episode of total war and its impact on central European mass politics. Although his reign as chancellor was short-lived, Schleicher bears key responsibility for the collapse of the Weimar Republic into the Nazi *Reich*. Without realizing the consequences, his policies and short-sighted tactics of power in the cabinet intrigue of the epoch paved the way for Hitler's dictatorship, which led to the worst disaster of state in the 20th century.

Building on Schleicher's example, the present study treats the general question of civil-military relations and especially the role of soldiers in politics in democratic states in crisis. The work at hand embodies an historical analysis of an episode that has interest for those concerned with the character of the past as well as those occupied with the challenges of democracy and arms in the present and future.

This thesis shows why Schleicher's cabinet and domestic politics failed so thoroughly. Specifically, it examines how his military and political socialization in the last years of the empire and the first years of the republic kept him from accepting democratic procedures or comprehensively understanding the shape of parliamentary politics and the related threats to the constitution. Furthermore, this study will enlighten a 21st-century readership to the role of the German General Staff in political affairs as well as the theme of the soldier in politics and political crises involving generals in the limelight.

#### **A. THE GENERAL STAFF AND ITS INFLUENCE IN GERMAN POLITICS AND SOCIETY**

The Prussian and German armies that existed from 1648 to 1945 represented the leading power in the state of the time, which to some extent dominated governmental activities. Since 1871, and the unity by force of arms, the German General Staff played a significant role in—domestic and foreign—governmental affairs. Pluralistic forces in Germany, such as they were, sought to exert some political control over soldiers as it was the case in western democracies, but with little success. Eventually, flag officers dominated governmental action, and they were in both world wars significantly responsible for catastrophic political and military-strategic mistakes. Their blind loyalty

and their belief in the intellectual, strategic, and political superiority of the military over civilian authorities mainly originated during Germany's integral nationalism and militarism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Moreover, Germany's leaders considered military hierarchy and organization as appropriate for the society as a whole, ending with Hitler's dictatorship, when it seemed that all German men and women wore a uniform.

The German case in the first republic demonstrates the problem of the inadequate integration of the military into the constitutional power of the young state, which bore heavy burdens of the past. In particular, this case suggests how military leaders saw the General Staff as a force above partisan politics but—at least in their understanding—as the most relevant and competent element to conduct national governance in domestic and foreign affairs—either in the pre-1918 world of total war or in its successor epoch of the Weimar Republic. Thus, the General Staff worked far beyond its natural competences and became in fact a governmental actor with major power, after Otto von Bismarck left office 1890.

In World War I, his service under the command of Paul von Hindenburg and Wilhelm Groener significantly militarized and influenced Schleicher. He became a major example of Germany's technocratic elite in uniform. This powerful trio of former 3rd Army Supreme Command officers arose in German politics, and they “cooperated within a close network of ties of friendship.”<sup>3</sup> In the Weimar Republic, these three flag officers played a partisan political role in the civil military affairs of the years 1919 to 1930.

Early in his career, Schleicher made clear that, in his view, parliamentarianism would weaken Germany: “Long before his appointment as Reich chancellor, as *eminence grise* of Weimar politics, the general had worked hard to destroy parliamentary democracy in the state.”<sup>4</sup> His trust in the abilities and in the mission of the German

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<sup>3</sup> Irene Strengé, *Kurt von Schleicher - Politik im Reichswehrministerium am Ende der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2006), 53. (arbeiteten miteinander in einem engen Geflecht freundschaftlicher Beziehungen.)

<sup>4</sup> Dietrich Orlow, *Weimar Prussia 1925–1933—The Illusion of Strength* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 222.



military to rule the nation's fate and, moreover, his blind faith in *Reichspräsident* Hindenburg—who had, together with Erich Ludendorff, implemented a military dictatorship in Germany after 1916 in war time Germany—led to a catastrophe. (Even before Schleicher took office as Chancellor, he contributed to the national myth that Hindenburg was Germany's designated leader, her *Übervater*.) Schleicher's political leadership is characterized as conniving, contradictory, opaque, and inconstant—the complete opposite how good governance should look or function.

Eventually, Schleicher successfully weakened the parliamentary system and undermined the constitution of the Republic of Weimar. His politics made Hitler—the new German Messiah or, in German, the *Erlöser*—possible. Schleicher's vita is an excellent example of a soldier in the arena of mass politics who overestimated his strategic skills and who lacked the essential capacity for comprehensive analysis of civil-military forces beyond his control and experience. His career and his political activities serve as a warning of the risks that arise when soldiers of a specific kind and mentality are too deeply involved in politics.

Being an anti-democratic conservative, alien to parliamentary politics and blind to the potential of totalitarianism in the 20th century, Schleicher aimed to restore the role of Germany's nobility by eliminating the democratic Weimar Republic and re-establishing an authoritarian presidential government in Germany. Schleicher understood himself as a member of a ruling elite and soldierly caste, which, since 1848 at the latest, had not respected the political will of the German people. Unfortunately—and with disastrous results—this elite served the idealized and atavistic notion of a Prussian German state and not the nation in the form of a 20th century democracy on a shaky foundation.

A major component of Schleicher's failure was that the democratic parties “responded to the approaches of the agile General with deepest mistrust. They recalled his liking for intrigue and thought him incapable of a true return to regular government.”<sup>5</sup> The powerful trade-unions acted similar: “[T]he factory workers and the lesser trade-

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<sup>5</sup> Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship—The Origins, Structure, and Effects of National Socialism* (New York, Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 201

union would not have approved trade-unions support of the Schleicher government.”<sup>6</sup> Eventually, Schleicher’s political isolation paved the way for Hitler, ending with the collapse of Germany in 1945.

## **B. MILITARY AND POLITICS: ALSO A 21ST-CENTURY ISSUE**

One of the leading questions in modern German history has been the failure of democracy in the face of crisis. This question was germane in the years before and after 30 January 1933, as well as in the 1950s, with the creation of new German armies in the cold war. Moreover, the case at hand stands within the experience of Euro-Atlantic civil-military relations generally, an understanding of which is central for any informed analysis for past and present questions of war and peace. Thus, the question at the heart of this thesis is relevant for a central European record of war and peace.

This case also says something generally to the global issues of the soldier in politics in the past and present. Contemporary critics in the United States toward Germany have deplored pacifism and an emphasis on civil power, without, however, any fundamental understanding of the soldier and politics in the past and its legacy for the present. The key to Schleicher’s politics is his socialization in the German General Staff. The General Staff activities left a deep scar in German history, and it is doubtless responsible for several aspects of Germany’s current domestic and foreign politics. Thus, an understanding of the role of the military and its activities in Prussia and Germany in the late 19th century and in the first three decades of the 20th century relates clearly to the reluctance of today’s German population and political leaders with regard to military engagements.

The outsized influence of the military in governmental decision-making processes as well as the problems of a young democracy with an authoritarian and militarist legacy resulted in a national and global disaster caused by Germany. This problem is of much wider relevance, granted the role of soldiers of politics in the present, and challenges to

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<sup>6</sup> Erich Matthias, “The Downfall of the Old Social Democratic Party in 1933,” in *Republic to Reich - The Making of the Nazi Revolution*, ed. Hajo Holborn (New York: Pantheon Books, Division of Random House, 1972), 80.

and in democratic governance in a time of emergency. If the military gets too intensively involved in political affairs, there will be a higher risk that the use of force will not remain a last resort, an *ultima ratio*. The deformation of the key institutions of state and politics that lead to militarization, authoritarianism, and illiberalism is much likelier to ensue, as a result.

### C. A BROAD SPECTRUM OF SCHOLARSHIP

The classical literature, written in an attempt to explain the failings of the Weimar Republic in the 1950s, retains enduring value. Gordon Craig's *The Politics of the Prussian Army* provides an excellent understanding of the role of the General Staff in Prussia and Germany. His comprehensive analysis will be an essential fundament to explain Schleicher's socialization whose life was formed by military means from the early beginning. Craig offers a convincing explanation why the General Staff deeply believed that it was a unique and the most relevant element in Germany's governmental affairs. Furthermore, he proves the tragic misunderstanding that these officers had with regard to their role while serving their fatherland (*Vaterland*).

In the *History of the German General Staff*, Walter Goerlitz describes in more detail the internal activities, structures, and players in Schleicher's time and place. He shows that a group of German officers, among them Schleicher and Groener, later minister of defense (*Reichswehrminister*) and minister of the interior, early started to consolidate and to increase the influence of the military in governmental affairs.

The German historian Thilo Vogelsang shows that Schleicher and Groener understood the military as a unique political tool and that both played a key role by underestimating Hitler and the Nazi movement. They aimed on enlarging the military's competences for governmental affairs, but they eventually never reached their political goals. Weakening the young democracy was their highest priority.<sup>7</sup> Vogelsang's book offers a major fundament to describe Schleicher's early socialization. Therefore, it is an

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<sup>7</sup> Thilo Vogelsang, *Kurt von Schleicher—ein General als Politiker* (Göttingen, Frankfurt, Zürich: Musterschmidt-Verlag, 1965), 48–71.

essential piece to understand the background for his political goals and his later governance as German Chancellor. Furthermore, he describes in detail Schleicher's relationship to Groener, which developed to become a keystone of politics in the Weimar Republic. Another author who broadly describes Schleicher's character and his relationship to Groener comprehensively is Theodor Eschenburg.

Goerlitz also proves that anti-democratic attitudes had a long-term tradition in the German military, particularly in the General Staff. The officer corps was dominated by members of the nobility like the so-called Junkers. On the whole, these people did not believe in democratic ideals but in the legitimate power of the imperial *Hohenzollern* family and their designated role as the nation's elite. The Junkers also feared that in a democratic environment, they could significantly lose influence in governmental affairs. Helmut von Moltke, who became chief of the Prussian General Staff in 1857, clearly expressed his anti-democratic attitudes.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, Goerlitz offers an explanation of why the General Staff had developed its elitist understanding and had created its own world concerning political realities, ideals, and circumstances. A great source on these civil-military relations is also the edition *Deutsche Militärgeschichte in sechs Bänden 1648–1939*, which provides a comprehensive picture with regard to the significant role of the military in Germany's governmental affairs. This edition also shows how the German military permanently tried to prevent social democratic influences within the forces. For example, the German emperor supported the officers through prohibiting in 1910 that social policy was discussed in military classes.<sup>9</sup>

Henry Ashby Turner's *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power* is a cornerstone to reconstruct the turbulent weeks when the chancellorship turned from Schleicher to Hitler

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Goerlitz, *History of The German General Staff 1657–1945* (New York, London: Fredrick A. Plaeger, 5th printing, 1964), 74.

<sup>9</sup> Wiegand Schmidt-Richberg. "Die Regierungszeit Wilhelms II." *Deutsche Militärgeschichte in sechs Bänden 1618–1939: Von der Entlassung Bismarcks bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs 1890 - 1918*, Band 3, Abschnitt V, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (München: Bernhard & Graefe Verlag, 1983), 115.

in January 1933. He comprehensively describes how Schleicher's goal to divide the Nazi party—the so-called *Querfront-Politik*—failed, and he eventually became a victim of his own political activities. Schleicher's view of Hitler was a fatal misjudgment with tragic consequences.

Geoffrey P. Megargee's book *Inside Hitler's High Command* mainly analyzes the time after Kurt von Schleicher's chancellorship, but it provides essential arguments to understand that the military elite in the Weimar Republic was focused on military technical aspects. These people were no politicians, but, bureaucrats. In this context, Michael Howard's *War in European History* is also helpful for its general insights into the epoch of total war.

Two books by the German scholar Irene Strengé provide a recent view on the events in Berlin in the winter of 1932–1933. In *Machtübernahme—Alles auf legalem Weg?*, she describes how conservative politicians paved the way for Hitler's dictatorship. The *Ermächtigungsgesetz* (enabling law), which formed the political fundament of the Nazi party's total power, was an idea of conservative elites in the Weimar Republic. Schleicher saw the state of emergency (*Staatsnotstand*) as an appropriate and legitimate tool for political circumstances he considered exceptional and dire. He intentionally planned to weaken parliamentarianism, which he saw as the heart of the republic's problem. This book highlights Schleicher's anti-democratic attitude and his lacking respect with regard to the Weimar Republic's constitution.<sup>10</sup>

Strengé's second book, *Kurt von Schleicher—Politik im Reichswehrministerium am Ende der Weimarer Republik*, is an essential source to analyze Schleicher's role as German Chancellor and to show his failure as soldier in politics, but it lacks information about his earlier career and his socialization in the German military as well as in the General Staff. Strengé shows that Schleicher developed his political ambitions very early. On 20 December 1918 he—holding the rank of major—explained them to General Staff officers. First, he aimed on a re-implementation of Germany's governmental power and

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<sup>10</sup> Irene Strengé, *Machtübernahme 1933—Alles auf legalem Weg?* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2002), 107–114.

authority; in his view a strong *Reichspräsident* with a strong military. His second goal was the reconstruction of the economy, and finally he saw the need to reconstitute Germany's military power as instrument for foreign affairs. All his following military and political activities focused on these ambitions. This is one reason why the Weimar Republic failed.<sup>11</sup> Strengé's main thesis is that Schleicher eventually committed political suicide, because he had a completely wrong understanding of the strategic situation. He weakened his own position in favor of the *Reichspräsident*.<sup>12</sup>

Louis Leo Snyder sees Schleicher as perpetual source of political instability in the Weimar Republic, since he "had been instrumental in intrigues leading to the making and the fall of cabinets."<sup>13</sup> Samuel William Halperin supports this thesis: Eventually, Schleicher's several intrigues and his conspiracy talks to Hindenburg lead to his complete isolation and failure.<sup>14</sup> As a revenge for an intrigue, which brought von Schleicher into office as chancellor, his predecessor Franz von Papen used an intrigue with Hitler to downfall him. Eventually, "Schleicher ... saw himself threatened by this high-powered conspiracy, appealed to the President for permission to dissolve the Reichstag. ... Hindenburg refused and thereby forced Schleicher into a position where he could do nothing but resign."<sup>15</sup> Karl Dietrich Bracher comes to the same conclusion: "It soon became apparent that Schleicher's enemies had not been idle; through the initiative of a handful of key persons, new alternatives opened up which brought down Schleicher and with him the last hopes for preventing a Nazi takeover."<sup>16</sup>

To comprehensively understand Hindenburg's and Groener's role in World War I as well as in the Weimar Republic's politics the biographic books by Johannes Hürter and Wolfram Pyta, are essential. Pyta offers a newer and more critical view on the former

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<sup>11</sup> Irene Strengé, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 16–20.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 226–227.

<sup>13</sup> Louis Leo Snyder, *The Weimar Republic—A History of Germany from Ebert to Hitler* (Princeton, Toronto, London, New York: D. van Nostrand Company, 1966), 96.

<sup>14</sup> Samuel William Halperin, *Germany Tried Democracy - A Political History of the Reich From 1918 to 1933* (Connecticut, Hamdon, London: Archon Books, reprint from 1963), 480–485.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Grunberger, *Germany 1918–1945* (London: B.T. Batsford 1964), 93.

<sup>16</sup> Bracher, *The German Dictatorship*, 200.

president's activities.<sup>17</sup> Similar to Schleicher, Hindenburg and Groener were generals in politics and significantly influenced by their socialization in the General Staff. Their socialization and their political activities, however, need to be seen with a broader perspective. Ursula Büttner offers a comprehensive analysis of Germany's political, economic, and social situation after World War I. The severe suffering of the population—millions of men killed, handicapped, or wounded in war; hundreds of thousands people starving; in January 1918 major strikes in the German defense industry occurred although the nation was war-fighting—was a major source for the heavy repercussions Germany faced.<sup>18</sup>

Eberhard Kolb and Dirk Schumann emphasize that Weimar was an improvised democracy without being deep-rooted in the German population's minds.<sup>19</sup> They also show that the Treaty of Versailles brought, on the one hand, bitter results for Germany. On the hand, the nation could retain its status as great European power.<sup>20</sup> Sebastian Haffner also emphasizes that Germany's strategic situation after World War I was even better than before 1914. It was not anymore encircled by four great powers: Austria-Hungary, England, France, and Russia. Austria-Hungary did not exist anymore. Russia became the Soviet Union, distanced itself from European politics, and, eventually, became a military partner of Germany. The government in Paris was concerned how to contain 70 million German neighbors with a French population of 40 million.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Based on recent research results concerning Hindenburg's antidemocratic attitude, the city of Münster decided in February 2012 to change the name of a central square from *Hindenburgplatz* to *Schlossplatz*. An intense public debate and initiatives followed, and a plebiscite was the consequence. On 16 September 2012, nearly 60 percent of the city's population voted against a renaming of the place after the former president. (Stadt Münster, "Hindenburgplatz," <http://www.muenster.de/stadt/strassennamen/hindenburg.html>, accessed May 29, 2013.)

<sup>18</sup> Ursula Büttner, *Weimar—Die überforderte Republik 1918–1933—Leistung und Versagen in Staat, Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft und Kultur* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008), 21–30.

<sup>19</sup> Eberhard Kolb and Dirk Schumann, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 8th ed. (München: Oldenbourg, 2013), 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 29–36.

<sup>21</sup> Sebastian Haffner, *Von Bismarck zu Hitler—Ein Rückblick* (München: Knauer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009), 180–182.

Hans Mommsen's analysis is essential to understand the developments in Germany between the two World Wars, and Hans Delbrück's observations allow a hermeneutic view on the nation's repercussions. Mary Fulbrook's analysis *The Divided Nation—A History of Germany 1918–1990* is an essential source, concluding that “certain army leaders, notably Schleicher, did their best to undermine democracy and replace it with some form of authoritarian state ... .”<sup>22</sup>

The thesis is a historical and biographical study, and the author's supreme goal was to use the broadest available spectrum of historical and recent sources. A main focus was to analyze Schleicher's military socialization and the role of the German General Staff in political affairs. Unfortunately, most of Schleicher's personal documents were destroyed after he was murdered by the Nazis. Moreover, Schleicher's favor for conspiracy let him usually prevent to use or keep written documents.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, today a broad picture of his governance is possible. The Germany's federal archive (*Bundesarchiv*) provides several governmental documents, which allow a comprehensive view on Schleicher's chancellorship. They show, for example, an unduly powerful *Reichspräsident* who permanently intervened in daily political business. Furthermore, these documents prove that Schleicher completely underestimated the critical political situation and the threat that occurred from Hitler's movement. These primary sources allow an unbiased view, and they are essential to analyze Schleicher's governmental activities.<sup>24</sup>

#### **D. TWO STORY LINES: GERMANY'S POLITICS AND SCHLEICHER'S WORLD**

To understand Schleicher's political activities an analysis of two major aspects is appropriate. On the one hand, the situation and the developments in Germany after 1848 played a significant role and set the historical framework. The nation faced a perpetual

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<sup>22</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation—A History of Germany 1918–1990* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 358.

<sup>23</sup> Irene Strenge, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Das Bundesarchiv, “Das Kabinett von Schleicher (1932/33),” <http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919–1933/0000/vsc/index.html>, accessed May 29, 2013.



suppression of democracy by its elites, especially the military. Bismarck's German unification through warfare paved the way for a distinct nationalism and militarism, enhanced by the birth of mass politics. Imperial Germany experienced an enormous upswing in its industrial production, including new political movements as well as dramatic economic and social changes. World War I left Germany in poverty, and the war's consequences led to dramatic repercussions. The Weimar Republic's early years were rife with hyper-inflation and bitter conditions for the people. After a brief—and illusory—period of relative stability and limited gains, the global economic crisis after 1929 demolished even this modest democratic consolidation—and fostered the political radicalism that Hitler made possible. All these developments formed Schleicher's world, and, indeed, they significantly influenced him.

On the other hand, his micro-world has to be analyzed, too. Schleicher's childhood, military education, serving in the General Staff, experiences in World War I, as well as in the Weimar Republic contributed to the general's decision to become a politician. Step by step, he increased his influence in political affairs, but he retained the mindset, behavior, and attitude of a military technocrat. Eventually, Schleicher insinuated himself into the very center of political power in Germany, including contacts to well-known key players like Hitler, Hindenburg, Papen, and Ludendorff. His strengths and his weaknesses colored his political career and its ignoble end. Thus, the soldier in politics Kurt von Schleicher both stars in and embodies the larger story of the disastrous activities of the German General Staff in imperial Germany and in the Weimar Republic.

## **II. MASS POLITICS AND THE SOLDIER IN GERMANY AFTER 1848: AN AUTHORITARIAN MODERNIZATION**

Schleicher's socialization as a citizen and an officer and his activities as politician in the Weimar Republic are deeply rooted in Germany's political, social, and economic developments in the second half of the 19th century. That is, Schleicher was born into a certain German political mindset that developed after 1848, in particular the failure of Germany's liberal revolution, which neither sought nor accepted a victory of liberal ideas and goals. Instead, the prevailing cultural and political forces came to be dominated by an old aristocracy oriented toward a fabled past. "Order" equated to the undisputed primacy of this class, even as the new industrial elite drove the German economy to the leading edge of modernity—in methods if not in social effect. Indeed, German society and—after unification in 1871—the German nation became steadily more authoritarian, anti-liberal, and militaristic. In all, these four broad developments—the perpetual suppression by anti-liberal forces of democracy; Germany's 19th-century unification through war; the consolidation of power in state and society after 1871; as well as the character of German society, economy, and industrialization in the epoch from 1870 until 1918—exercised characteristic influences on Schleicher and his generation with particularly fatal consequences for the 20th century.

### **A. THE PERPETUAL SUPPRESSION OF DEMOCRACY**

While Germany's 19th century liberal-national movements led to the foundation of a strong national state, they failed to foster the political culture and the institutions of checks and balances and civil society. Similar politics gripped other continental European states like Austria-Hungary and Russia: "The danger of liberal-national revolution cemented the ties between the autocratic Powers and, until the year of revolution (1848), all three Powers presented a united front against the spread of liberal ideas or institutions within their dominions."<sup>25</sup> In this regard, the road to German national unity diverged

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<sup>25</sup> Earnest James Passant, *A Short History of Germany 1815–1945* (London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 22.

significantly inform the model of Britain and France for instance. In the end, the backward-looking elites successfully suppressed the spread of liberal ideas and aspirations beginning in 1819, again in 1848, also in 1862, and, most especially, in the years after 1871 until 1918.

In a word, the problem was Prussia. The basically right-wing and conservative Prussia—dominated by the feudal landowning nobility, the Junkers, and ruled through an effective but absolutistic bureaucracy—did not embrace the liberal-national movements, which aimed on implementing the French Revolution’s ideals in a German (rather than strictly Prussian) context. After the March revolutions in 1848, with the goal of national unity and a constitutional monarchy, a kind of German government eventuated in the industrializing west, including a parliament in the *Paulskirche* of Frankfurt-am-Main. In response to external political pressure from both Austria and Russia, the parliament sought to bring Prussia into the compact for the sake of its considerable size and fighting power—even if this kind of union would dilute or delay the more ambitious liberal agenda of the more westerly (and Western) partners.<sup>26</sup> There was also the matter of Prussia’s administrative capabilities, which seemed vital to the consolidation of power in a new German state, because “[h]er government, if autocratic, was at least efficient, and her bureaucrats, however much disliked, commanded respect by their thoroughness and freedom from corruption.”<sup>27</sup> When, by the end of the momentous year 1848, the Prussian king bestowed a much watered-down constitution on his subjects as a gift, any pretenses of genuine democracy vanished as surely as the liberals of the so-called Forty-Eighter generation, who emigrated in droves.

The predominance of Prussia in the unification process also changed the nature of the project in a fundamental way, as Prussia preferred a “small German” solution. Earlier visions called for the unification of all German peoples—including, for example, the Austrians—but this “greater Germany” necessarily would include populations of non-Germans who lived in Habsburg lands. According to the British historian Richard Evans,

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<sup>26</sup> Haffner, *Von Bismarck zu Hitler*, 21–30.

<sup>27</sup> Passant, *Germany 1815–1945*, 27.

“the liberals had correctly decided that there was no chance of Germany uniting ... in a nation-state that included German-speaking Austria. That would have meant the break-up of the Hapsburg monarchy, which included huge swathes of territory ... that lay outside the German Confederation, and included many millions of people who spoke languages other than German.”<sup>28</sup> That is, the *Paulskirche* could not adjudicate the fate of Czechs and Hungarians successfully in addition to the problem of legitimacy of power in the state. So while Prussia was in, Austria was out of the new ideal of unification.

Thus, Germany took shape with little more than a veneer of constitutionalism on a state, including its bureaucracy and its army that had little use for liberalization. With regard to domestic politics, no major changes occurred, because “[i]n alliance with the Junkers, the system of local government in the countryside was restored to the situation before 1850, under which the landowners exercised a feudal jurisdiction, whilst prosecutions against intellectuals and politicians were supported by the perjured evidence of political agents.”<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps the most central figure in this time and place was Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898), who unified Germany under Prussia’s leadership and both embodied and embedded these trends in the new state. Eventually, “it was to be Bismarck’s triumph to turn ... liberal-nationalism into a national-liberalism in which the liberal idea was to be subordinated to the ambitions of conservative Prussia to unite and dominate Germany.”<sup>30</sup> In the view of Bracher, Bismarck started—after the failure of the 1848 democratic revolution—a domestic “conservative-national revolution from above.”<sup>31</sup> For example, “[t]he upper house was changed into a house of landlords, and many of the members were appointed by the [Prussian] king. The *Bürgerwehr* [militia] was abolished and the

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<sup>28</sup> Richard John Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>29</sup> Passant, *Germany 1815–1945*, 41.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Bracher, *The German Dictatorship*, 17.

principle of a standing army reaffirmed. The oath to the colours (*Fahneneid*) replaced the oath to the constitution.”<sup>32</sup>

As Howard notes: “The middle class radicals of the 1820s and 30s ... were certainly revolutionary in 1848, and continued to constitute a troublesome opposition in the 1850s. But Bismarck drew their sting by persuading the Prussian monarchy to espouse the cause of German nationalism and in 1871 they shouted *Hoch dem Kaiser!* as loudly as anyone.”<sup>33</sup>

Bismarck could rely on the support of military elites in any and all measures to suppress liberalism. Field Marshal Edwin von Manteuffel, for instance—who was one of the king’s most influential military advisors—“was an unwavering absolutist and, in his mind, the greatest mistake ever made by the Prussian monarchy had been its decision to grant a constitution to the Prussian people.”<sup>34</sup> While the constitution could not be entirely un-granted, the Prussian German leaders of Manteuffel’s time did their utmost to ensure that little, if any, liberalization took hold in their empire.

## **B. GERMANY’S UNIFICATION THROUGH WAR**

According to Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Bismarck implemented a double-track strategy. Domestically, he antagonized liberals through repression, imprisonment, as well as limiting the freedom of press. At the same time, the chancellor understood the influence of a muscular foreign policy as a means to strengthen the monarchy and prevent an increase of liberal momentum<sup>35</sup>—foreign adventures rallied most factions to the national cause most of the time. As such, under Bismarck’s political leadership in the era

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<sup>32</sup> Martin Kitchen, *A Military History of Germany - from the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day* (Bloomington, London: India University Press), 1975, 88.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Howard, *War in European History* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 108.

<sup>34</sup> Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640–1945* (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 149.

<sup>35</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich 1871–1918*, 7th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 32–33.

from 1862 until 1871, Prussia and her German allies fought three wars to consolidate German territory and borders as well as to build a unified nation.

### 1. Setting the Stage with Denmark and Austria

In the first war of unification, an Austrian-Prussian coalition defeated Denmark. After the Danish armistice on 20 July 1864 and the signing of the final term on 27 October 1864, three strategically important duchies<sup>36</sup> came under the joint, but not combined, governance of Berlin and Vienna. This situation was, however, solely a temporary answer, because “[t]he question of the ultimate disposal of these territories had now to be decided. The condominium of the two German Great Powers was unlikely to prove a satisfactory permanent solution.”<sup>37</sup>

Bismarck cunningly paved the way for a war about the German ascendancy between Austria and Prussia through an expertly balanced scheme of domestic and international politics of violence and limits to statecraft. Eventually, he successfully provoked “Austria to such degree that she would provide a *casus belli* and thus persuade [the reluctant Prussian] King William that she, and not Prussia, was the aggressor.”<sup>38</sup> Prussia defeated Austria and could significantly increase as well as unite its so far fragmented territories. One consequence of the war with Austria was the implementation of the North German Confederation (*Norddeutscher Bund*). Within this alliance, Prussia’s leadership was unquestionable: “Prussia herself had after the 1866 annexations 24 million inhabitants, all other 22 members ... together six [million].”<sup>39</sup> With regard to civil-military relations of the era, it is remarkable that “at the very outset of hostilities against Austria, on June 1866, a royal cabinet order stated that from now on, the commands of the [Prussian] General Staff would be communicated directly to the troops and no longer

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<sup>36</sup> Holstein, Lauenburg, and Schleswig.

<sup>37</sup> Passant, *Germany 1815–1945*, 52.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>39</sup> Haffner, *Von Bismarck zu Hitler*, 39. (Preußen allein hatte nach den Annexionen von 1866 24 Millionen Einwohner, alle übrigen Mitglieder ... zusammen sechs.)

through the mediation of the War Ministry.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover, “[w]ithin the North German Confederation there was no minister of war, and thus no constitutional link between the army and the Reichstag. Thus the king of Prussia as supreme commander was in an even stronger position than he was in Prussia itself.”<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, “Bismarck’s victory over Austria was also a victory over the forces of liberalism in Prussia.”<sup>42</sup> This second victory came by design: “Bismarck had entered the fray to put an end once and for all to attacks by the liberal opposition who were attempting to transform the authoritarian state into a parliamentary democracy ... .”<sup>43</sup> In his function as Prussian minister president and the North German Confederation’s chancellor, Bismarck unambiguously demonstrated his favor for royal power and his skepticism with regard to parliamentarianism: “[H]e made it clear that neither he nor the king admitted the principle of the responsibility of ministers to the elected house and he asserted the right, and even the duty, of the Crown to act independently if a parliamentary deadlock occurred.”<sup>44</sup> Earnest James Passant concludes: “After 1866 there was no further progress towards fully responsible parliamentary government in Prussia until the collapse of 1918.”<sup>45</sup>

## **2. The Main Event: France**

The real prize for Bismarck was France, which would have to be defeated “if German unity were to be completed.”<sup>46</sup> Even though France’s self-made emperor, Napoleon III, had, in the years since 1851, taken the country well afield of the liberal ideals of the Tennis Court Oath, Paris would still object to a fortified and unified Germany for pure power-political reasons. To obviate any threat from the western border,

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<sup>40</sup> Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 194–195.

<sup>41</sup> Kitchen, *Military History of Germany*, 122.

<sup>42</sup> Passant, *Germany 1815–1945*, 57.

<sup>43</sup> Hagen Schulze, *States, Nations and Nationalism—From the Middle Ages to the Present* (Malden, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 220.

<sup>44</sup> Passant, *Germany 1815–1945*, 58.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

“[f]rom 1866 to 1870 the strategic planning of the [German] General Staff was devoted to working out the details of an offensive against France.”<sup>47</sup>

At the same time, the Prussian General Staff emerged as a political and military innovation of the 19th century, a body of military expertise with its own increasing political prerogatives, which did or did not fit into the overall goals of statecraft. This innovation represents a significant aspect of this story of the soldier in politics, that is, that soldiers therewith acquired a role in the political life of a nation that they had never had previous in quite the same way.

The General Staff’s chief, Moltke, building on the momentum of the earlier wars, “saw a war against France as the ideal chance to unify Germany under Prussia in a way that would necessitate few concessions to liberalism or democracy.”<sup>48</sup> His antidemocratic attitude, a legacy of 1848 and the opinions of his social caste, was clear at an early stage shaped by the experience of revolution in Europe from 1789 until 1848: Already in 1850, Moltke “wrote to his brother that the curtain had come down on Prussia’s worst enemy, democracy.”<sup>49</sup>

Haffner, however, shows that Bismarck was quite reluctant with respect to unforeseeable military adventures, which could cause a potential catastrophe for the young and fragile German state. The chancellor carefully prioritized the nation’s consolidation, and he had no desire for a war that would overturn the European system so crucial to a stable order in which Germany would emerge dominant. The fast-paced incidents in July 1870 that led to war between France and the North German Confederation—in particular the French-Prussian struggle over the successor for the vacant Spanish throne—surprised him.<sup>50</sup> Still, this unanticipated development did not stop Bismarck from provoking a diplomatic escalation, and, eventually, the French government declared war on Prussia on 19 July 1870.

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<sup>47</sup> Kitchen, *Military History of Germany*, 124.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Goerlitz, *History of The German General Staff*, 74.

<sup>50</sup> Haffner, *Von Bismarck zu Hitler*, 41–44.



During the Franco-Prussian war, the civil-military struggles became more obvious than in the years before. A significantly higher number of soldiers—” [b]y the first week of August the total German mobilization was 1.183 million men. The maximum French mobilized strength at the same time, was 567,000”<sup>51</sup>—and superiority with regard to planning, tactics, and leadership guaranteed that “the outcome of the Franco-Prussian war was never in doubt.”<sup>52</sup>

Bismarck and Moltke had widely different conceptions about whether the chancellor or the chief of the General Staff should lead during wartime. On the one hand, Moltke was convinced that “once a war began, the politician must step into the background and leave all aspects of warmaking [*sic*] to military leaders.”<sup>53</sup> Bismarck, on the other hand, “discovered that the army leaders had a tendency to regard war as a province in which alone they had competence, that they were reluctant to admit that the civilian ministers had any authority to influence the course of operations and that they were dangerously willing, in the name of military expediency, to disregard important considerations of international diplomacy.”<sup>54</sup> Eventually, Bismarck enforced the primacy of civil leadership in *political* affairs, and the German victory advanced his goal to further consolidate Germany under Prussian hegemony.

### C. CONSOLIDATION OF POWER AFTER 1871

On 18 January 1871, the proclamation of the German *Reich* occurred in Versailles, and the Prussian King Wilhelm I (1797–1888) became German emperor. He did not preside over a republic with a distinct parliamentarianism but a federal monarchy under Prussia’s dominance, where “[e]ven the intellectuals saw themselves as soldiers. As [Prussian] Professor Du Bois-Reymond proclaimed in 1870: ‘The University of Berlin ... is the spiritual Household Regiment of the house of Hohenzollern ... Historians are ...

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<sup>51</sup> Trever Nevitt Dupuy, *A Genius for War - The German Army and General Staff, 1807–1945* (Engelwood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Inc., 1977), 96.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>54</sup> Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 180.

the Mamelukes of Prussian politics.’”<sup>55</sup> Nationalistic sentiments rose, and many Germans “understood 1870 as revenge for the Napoleonic wars of conquest in the first ten years of the 19th century.”<sup>56</sup> The military became a key symbol for the German unification and strength, and “[a]s a result many liberals were prepared to silence their criticisms of the military, ignore their democratic aspirations and devote most of their time and energy to making money.”<sup>57</sup>

The civil-military tensions that accompanied the foundation of the Second Reich persisted, as well, though it first appeared as a personality conflict more than anything else. Moltke, “was never able completely to reconcile himself to ... elementary laws of statesmanship[.]”<sup>58</sup> while his rival Bismarck “understood more clearly than most statesmen and officers of his era the overriding relevance of political considerations for every level of military activity.”<sup>59</sup> In sum, the chief of the General Staff was a military technocrat, and because he was “accustomed to thinking in terms of pure strategy and to drawing up plans of almost mathematical exactitude, he was irritated by the disruption of his calculations by unpleasant political realities.”<sup>60</sup> According to Marcus Jones, the chancellor viewed politics neither as arithmetic nor as mathematics. Bismarck perpetually considered political consequences, and “his most pronounced feature as a strategic actor was his moderation and prudence. Bismarck never set his country on a course that his mind had not cautiously explored beforehand.”<sup>61</sup> The chancellor understood that political success cannot be comprehensively preplanned and that politics have to be adapted perpetually. Therefore, his “great genius as the founder of a Prussian-dominated German

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<sup>55</sup> Kitchen, *Military History of Germany*, 132.

<sup>56</sup> Haffner, *Von Bismarck zu Hitler*, 45. (empfanden 1870 als eine Revanche für die napoleonischen Eroberungskriege in den ersten 10 Jahren des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts)

<sup>57</sup> Kitchen, *Military History of Germany*, 132.

<sup>58</sup> Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 195.

<sup>59</sup> Marcus Jones, “Strategy as character: Bismarck and the Prusso-German question, 1862–1878,” in *The shaping of grand strategy—policy, diplomacy, and war*, ed. Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich, and James Lacey (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 98.

<sup>60</sup> Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 195.

<sup>61</sup> Jones, “Strategy as character,” 83.

nation lay not in his adherence to a systematic program or plan but in his expert navigation of uncertain events through intuition and broad experience.”<sup>62</sup>

However, Moltke’s view reached more of Germany’s leaders because the General Staff served as the incubator for many of the Second Reich’s leading statesmen. For one signal example, before he acceded to the throne, Wilhelm II (1859–1941) was for a period of time assigned to Germany’s foreign office that Bismarck led from 1871 until his dismissal in 1890. Wilhelm failed utterly to grasp Bismarck’s approach to leading Germany.<sup>63</sup> He had joined the German army at the age of 17; he was 29 when he became emperor, by which time he clearly preferred military attitudes and approaches even though he was not a full-time soldier. Wilhelm clearly favored the recommendations of military technocrats who were significantly influenced by their socialization in the General Staff.

Not surprisingly, then, the new emperor, crowned in 1888, strengthened the army’s influence in political affairs. “One of William’s first steps after ascending the throne was to expand and reorganize the royal *mission militaire* and to give it the name royal headquarters ... .”<sup>64</sup> The emperor’s absolutistic attitude and his skepticism with respect to the constitution was obvious, and he “was always more intimate with members of his suite [of assigned adjutants and generals] than he was with responsible ministers of state.”<sup>65</sup> Imbued with Moltke’s skepticism, the army had successfully assured its status as essential political element, including significant influence in foreign and domestic political affairs.

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<sup>62</sup> Jones, “Strategy as character,” 80–81.

<sup>63</sup> Even after Germany’s defeat in World War I, Wilhelm II did not understand the differences between political and military thinking and activities. In 1922, Wilhelm II wrote in his memoirs of the foreign office that “able men, with independent ideas, were not schooled and trained there. This was in contrast to the General Staff under Moltke. There new officers were carefully developed and trained to independent thinking and action.” (Wilhelm II von Preußen, *The Kaiser’s Memoirs* (New York, London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1922), 6.)

<sup>64</sup> Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 240.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Bismarck observed these developments critically. For instance, after the chief of the imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Alfred von Waldersee, had informed Austria that it had no reason to fear a Russian offensive, “Bismarck ... complained—and that not unreasonably—of this interference of the General Staff in diplomatic affairs.”<sup>66</sup> The field marshal began to use his military attaché system for his foreign political goals and activities, separate from traditional diplomatic procedures. Eventually, Waldersee convinced Wilhelm II, and the aging chancellor perpetually lost influence. Finally, the emperor—“who shared the general’s belief in the superiority of military to civilian intelligence”<sup>67</sup>—dismissed Bismarck in 1890.

A contemporary political cartoon in Britain’s *Punch* magazine famously characterized Bismarck’s firing as “dropping the pilot.” But what about the German ship of state? A new German era began, but—with a 21st century view—the preconditions were not promising, because Bismarck’s “long tenure as Reichskanzler left in its wake a constitutional structure ill suited [*SIC*] to responsible stewardship of Germany’s growing power, a political system infantilized by his condescending leadership style, and a nation steeped in admiration of military achievement.”<sup>68</sup> Bismarck’s dismissal in 1890 was probably the main step from Prussian-monarchic to militaristic Germany. According to Samuel W. Mitcham, Germany “was ... on her last legs militarily. She had been diplomatically outmaneuvered almost constantly since ... Wilhelm II removed ... Bismarck.”<sup>69</sup> Moreover, “[t]he turning away from Bismarck’s program with regard to foreign affairs in the 1890s, initiated a paradigm change in foreign and military politics.”<sup>70</sup> More precisely, the outsized influence of the military in governmental

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<sup>66</sup> Goerlitz, *History of The German General Staff*, 112.

<sup>67</sup> Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 271.

<sup>68</sup> Jones, “Strategy as character,” 109.

<sup>69</sup> Samuel W. Mitcham, *Why Hitler? The Genesis of the Nazi Reich* (Westport, London: Praeger, 1996), 1.

<sup>70</sup> Bernhard R. Kroener, *Militär, Staat und Gesellschaft im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: Oldenbourg, 2011), 1. (Die Abkehr vom außenpolitischen Programm Bismarck’s leitete in den 1890er Jahren einen außer- und militärpolitischen Paradigmenwechsel ein.)

affairs—with all fatal and tragic consequences—became a political, social, and economic key factor in Germany.

#### **D. SOCIETY, ECONOMY, AND INDUSTRIALIZATION**

While German politics in the late 19th century focused on maintaining the status quo of Prussian power—beneath the seeming stability, if not stolidity—momentous social and economic changes fizzed and popped with all the energy of the so-called second Industrial Revolution. On the one hand, all over in Europe “[t]he daily lives of great masses of people were radically changed, and time-honoured ties, myths and loyalties faded away.”<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, in comparison with England and France, Germany came late to industrialization, but once Germany started, industrialization and development proceeded at a breathtaking pace. Not only did Germany catch up to the world’s leaders in such classic heavy industrial production as coal and steel—thanks, in part, to availing itself of the newest technologies and techniques—but it made itself important in such new sectors as chemicals and electricity.

From the very beginning, this industrialization followed a top-down-approach. With the state’s support and blessing, major banks, large enterprises, syndicates, trusts, as well as cartels arose, and eventually, a few men controlled Germany’s economy.<sup>72</sup> This circumstance meant that the rise of these very few and very wealthy capitalists more or less precluded the rise of the wider middle class either economically or politically. Indeed, “[i]t remains a fact that the broad fundament of middle class entrepreneurship played a minor role during the German industrialization than large economic formations and their leaders.”<sup>73</sup> Moreover, in Wehler’s view, the German *Bürgertum* did not develop the English desire for political participation and liberalism. Rather, it developed feudal

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<sup>71</sup> Schulze, *States, Nations and Nationalism*, 151.

<sup>72</sup> Ralf Dahrendorf, *Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland* (München: R. Piper & Co, 1965), 47–48.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 49. (Die Tatsache bleibt, daß der breite Unterbau bürgerlichen Unternehmertums in der deutschen Industrialisierung von vornherein eine geringere Rolle gespielt hat als die großen Wirtschaftsgebilde und ihre Führer.)

aims as well as behaviors and copied attitudes of the nobility.<sup>74</sup> In the end, a powerful German middle class with the potential to call for democratic reforms and to counter the royal family's and nobility's claim to power did not exist.

At the same time, the German society was also significantly influenced by an increase of militarism. To be sure, the militarization of society was not exclusively a German phenomenon, because “[b]y the end of the nineteenth century European society was militarized to a very remarkable degree.”<sup>75</sup> Germany's authoritarian system and its elites, though, were essential to the increase in the militaristic spirit of the time (*Zeitgeist*). Large segments of German society were infected, and in the context of “[t]he attitudes towards life and culture of *Wilhelminismus*, the military played a central role. The ‘hurrah-patriotism’ ... saw in the lieutenant the ideal of society that aspired towards the realization of Nationalism and Imperialism.”<sup>76</sup>

In addition, the conservative middle class understood “the upcoming labor movements, organized in Germany's Social Democratic Party and in labor unions, as internal enemy.”<sup>77</sup> The ideal of German patriarchic family structures became symbolic as key to success for an ascendant industrialized Germany.<sup>78</sup> It was not the desire for liberalism but the belief in absolutistic and militaristic behavior that the middle class demonstrated. Therefore, Germany's epoch of industrialization, the *Gründerzeit* (1871–1890), did not witness the same increasing power of the parliament and the people as, for example, in Victorian Britain.

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<sup>74</sup> Wehler, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich*, 54.

<sup>75</sup> Howard, *War in European History*, 110.

<sup>76</sup> Wolfgang Benz, “Der Aufbruch in die Moderne. Das 20. Jahrhundert,” in *Gebhardt—Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, ed. Wolfgang Benz, 10th ed., vol. 18 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2010), 50. (Im Lebensgefühl und in der Kultur des Wilhelminismus spielte das Militär die zentrale Rolle. Der »Hurra-Patriotismus« ... sah im Leutnant das gesellschaftliche Ideal, das zur Verwirklichung im Nationalismus und Imperialismus strebte.)

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. (die aufstrebende Arbeiterbewegung, organisiert von der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands und in Gewerkschaften, als innerer Feind)

<sup>78</sup> Dahrendorf, *Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland*, 60.

Right-wing political actors saw their opportunity to increase political power through mass politics, and they successfully campaigned on nationalist platforms as a means to engage a larger voting public as part of the age. These actors spread the idea that Germany had to fight to gain her rightful position in global power politics. Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz (1849–1939), for instance, the deputy naval minister in Germany’s admiralty, garnered 1.1 million members<sup>79</sup> for his fleet association (*Flottenverein*) by 1913.<sup>80</sup> Typical of mass mobilization in the age of imperialism at the end of the 19th century, this association aimed at strengthening German global military ambitions through the buildup of a powerful fleet with a durable domestic political base.

Tirpitz’ influence in governmental affairs was extraordinary: London’s offer to end the naval arms race between England and Germany—the Haldane Mission in 1912—was in favor of the then-functioning German chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, but it failed by imperial decision after Tirpitz’ intervention.<sup>81</sup> Again, the emperor preferred military over political advice.

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<sup>79</sup> In 1910, Germany’s population was 64.6 million. (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, “Zahlen und Fakten - die soziale Situation in Deutschland,” <http://www.bpb.de/nachschlagen/zahlen-und-fakten/soziale-situation-in-deutschland/61532/bevoelkerungsentwicklung>, accessed May 3, 2013.)

<sup>80</sup> Osterhammel, “1880 bis 1914,” in *Informationen zur politischen Bildung*, 2/2012, no. 315 (2012), 56.

<sup>81</sup> Haffner, *Von Bismarck zu Hitler*, 105–106.

### III. AN EXEMPLARY OFFICER'S CAREER: KURT VON SCHLEICHER'S POLITICAL AND MILITARY SOCIALIZATION IN IMPERIAL GERMANY

Schleicher's childhood, youth, education, and career were thoroughly steeped in the military of the transition from the Wilhelmine epoch to the era of total war. Indeed, when he joined the military by the end of the 19th century, the army played a key role in the German public life. The military's brain, the General Staff, had the status of national elite. Its leaders and members set themselves to subjects well beyond military questions in mass politics; they became significantly involved in international as well as domestic politics and economics.<sup>82</sup> Once war came in 1914, along with such leading figures as Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and Groener, Schleicher became a member of this elite—and elitist—circle, and his skills, his good connections, as well as his ambition allowed him to increase steadily his military and political influence.

The General Staff and Schleicher's mentors socialized him in the spirit of the military technocrats of the epoch of total war. Step by step, these technocrats gained overwhelming power in Germany's political affairs: "Operational plans for future wars were adopted ... in a form which seriously limited the diplomatic freedom of the state ... ."<sup>83</sup> Moreover, "the military advisers of the Crown argued that civilian statesmen had neither the technical knowledge nor the realistic approach which the *Zeitgeist* required."<sup>84</sup> The officer—and increasingly the politician—Kurt von Schleicher deeply believed in the military's superiority over civilian attitudes and the cacophony of conflicted interests.

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<sup>82</sup> In 1914, the peacetime army had 800,000 soldiers; 650 of them were General Staff officers. (Schmidt-Richberg, *Deutsche Militärgeschichte in sechs Bänden 1618–1939*, 71.)

<sup>83</sup> Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, xvii.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.



## A. THE WORLD OF KURT VON SCHLEICHER

Kurt Ferdinand Friedrich Hermann von Schleicher was born in the Prussian city of Brandenburg an der Havel on 7 April 1882—the same year that, on the one hand, saw the first electric street lights in Berlin and, on the other hand, saw Kaiser Wilhelm I proclaim that the direction of government politics was his personal prerogative.

Germany's elite circles of nobility, officers, and industrialists accepted the emperor's legitimacy and, moreover, they initiated political strategies that made all of them winners—at the specific cost of the broader middle classes and their liberal inclinations. The nobility, the Junkers, could retain their economic role as well as their political dominance in the rural agrarian areas; the officers successfully strengthened their political influence and increased the size of the forces; and the industrialists benefitted from large public contracts, especially for the military.

Schleicher's father was an officer, and his mother descended from a distinguished entrepreneurial family—a social stratum that by now had become thoroughly intertwined with the old aristocracy. In 1778, Schleicher's family entered the nobility and developed a self-conception of loyalty to Prussia, the monarchy, and Protestantism, as well as partially to the teachings of pietism. In 1815, Schleicher's great-grandfather—in the function as commander of a Prussian *Landwehr* regiment—fell in the battle of Ligny against Napoleonic France,<sup>85</sup> the quintessential biography of a loyal Junker. Amid his family's heritage and the historic context, Schleicher had to understand imperial Germany as key to the success and strength of the nation—and challengers to this apparent order as a threat or at least a problem.

## B. THE MAKING OF AN OFFICER AND MILITARY TECHNOCRAT

In compliance with his father's wish, Schleicher joined the German army and became a lieutenant in 1900. He spent his first years as an officer in the 3rd *Garde-Regiment zu Fuß* in Berlin. This regiment boasted several members who later became key players in Germany's political and military affairs. For instance, Paul von Hindenburg

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<sup>85</sup> Vogelsang, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 9.

served there, as well as his son Oskar, who became Schleicher's friend. His good pedigree in the guard thus landed him, from the very beginning, in like-minded company in the brains of the army.

In 1910, Schleicher attended the *Kriegsakademie*, and, after finishing his education, he became a member of the imperial General Staff in 1913. In the same year he attained the rank of a captain. Schleicher served in the branch that dealt with such military planning considerations as railway systems; his branch chief was Lt. Colonel Wilhelm Groener.

Schleicher established a relationship of mutual trust with Groener at a fateful moment on the brink of momentous civil military change. According to Johannes Hürter, Schleicher became Groener's favorite student ("*Lieblingsschüler*").<sup>86</sup> He might not have been the likeliest candidate for this distinction. Schleicher, an enormously industrious officer, managed his tasks successfully, despite some deficiencies in his expertise.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, Schleicher developed ideas "so quickly and abundantly that he had no time to think them through and test them. ... He tended to express himself with imprecision, partly for tactical reasons but sometimes because he had not given, or did not wish to give, sufficient thought to the matter of which he was speaking."<sup>88</sup> This limited world view as applied to the needs of the moment as well as a shocking lack of strategic farsightedness played a key role in his eventual political failure.

Germany's decision to commence the war on 1 August 1914 expanded the role of the General Staff decisively. In peacetime, the staff had basically no military authority and functioned mainly as a planning tool. With the beginning of the war, however, its chief gained a unique position, including the authority to implement the operational

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<sup>86</sup> Johannes Hürter, Wilhelm Groener—*Reichswehrminister am Ende der Weimarer Republik (1928–1932)* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1993), 9.

<sup>87</sup> Vogelsang, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 11.

<sup>88</sup> Theodor Eschenburg, "The Role of the Personality in the Crisis of the Weimar Republic: Hindenburg, Brüning, Groener, Schleicher," in *Republic to Reich - The Making of the Nazi Revolution*, ed. Hajo Holborn (New York: Pantheon Books, Division of Random House, 1972), 21.

orders of the supreme commander—the emperor.<sup>89</sup> Three generals, Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and Groener—leading lights in this constellation of forces—influenced Schleicher’s thinking, behavior, and career significantly. Schleicher’s war experience may have been abbreviated, but the General Staff, including its monarchic, anti-democratic, and technocratic attitude, remained his military and spiritual home, fundamentally at odds with pluralistic politics especially on the Western model.

In World War I, Schleicher served in the staff of the *Generalquartiermeister*—until 1916. This staff did not exist in peacetime, either, and it was Groener’s railway systems branch’s responsibility to implement the *Generalquartiermeister* headquarters in 1914. During this time, Schleicher gained insight into the staff’s far-ranging military fields of activity: supply of the army in the field as well as political, economic, and organizational challenges concerning Germany, its allies, and occupied territories.<sup>90</sup> From November 1916 until May 1917, Schleicher served in the *Kriegsamt*,<sup>91</sup> the War Office, a new agency—implemented on 1 November 1916, responsible for war-economy related affairs, and led by Groener.

Schleicher began his sole front-related mission in May 1917 as 1st General Staff officer in the 237th Infantry Division that operated in Galicia on the eastern front; he completed it in August of the same year. Thereafter, Schleicher served in the 3rd Army Supreme Command, led by Hindenburg and Ludendorff (and succeeded by Groener on 29 October 1918).<sup>92</sup>

His wartime experiences doubtless had a major influence on Schleicher’s later political activities. The total-war situation, which worsened as the war lasted far longer than anyone had predicted, in turn affected large parts of the German society: Directly through husbands, fathers, and sons who served in war; indirectly through the “impact on

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<sup>89</sup> Schmidt-Richberg, *Deutsche Militärgeschichte in sechs Bänden 1618–1939*, 71–72.

<sup>90</sup> Vogelsang, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 12.

<sup>91</sup> Deutsches Historisches Museum, “Biographie Kurt von Schleicher—Militär, Politiker 1882–1934,” <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/biografien/SchleicherKurt/>. accessed May 3, 2013.

<sup>92</sup> Vogelsang, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 14–16.

the living standards and morale of every German on the home front. ... The main areas of conflict can be roughly grouped under three headings: the manpower issue, the shortage of civilian goods, and the food-supply problem.”<sup>93</sup> Furthermore—according to Hans Delbrück—”in Germany the lack of political leaders became evident to an almost incredible degree.”<sup>94</sup> In 1918, he concluded: “In Germany we have only technical specialists but no one trained for political leadership.”<sup>95</sup> Nonetheless, the military took control of the government, step by step as the strategic situation worsened and the promise of operational brilliance failed to lead to a significant result in the years 1915–1916.

No branch of the government or state was free of military influence, and by 1917, “William II was ... a ‘shadow Kaiser’, [and] supreme warlord in name only.”<sup>96</sup> Indeed, Hindenburg and Ludendorff functioned as heads of the German government that had clear characteristics of a dictatorship. As a member of the General Staff as well as of the 3rd Army Supreme Command, Schleicher had an active part in this dictatorship, and it is not surprising that he viewed as natural and necessary a key role for the German military in governmental affairs. Now holding the rank of major since July 1918, Schleicher found himself increasingly involved in political affairs, after Groener assigned him to lead the newly formed political branch in the 3rd Army Supreme Command. This assignment significantly enhanced Schleicher’s access to key political players in Berlin just as the German cause was faltering in a fateful way.<sup>97</sup> Eventually, Schleicher became Groener’s “Cardinal in politics,”<sup>98</sup> a central figure of the military’s political activities. From the spring 1919 on, Schleicher belonged to Hindenburg’s inner circle of advisors,

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<sup>93</sup> David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century—A History of Germany 1780–1918* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 471.

<sup>94</sup> Hans Delbrück, *Delbrück’s Modern Military History*, ed. Arden Bucholz (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 164.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century*, 487.

<sup>97</sup> Vogelsang, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 19–20.

<sup>98</sup> Rainer Wohlfeil, “Heer und Republik, “ in *Deutsche Militärgeschichte in sechs Bänden 1618–1939: Reichswehr und Republik 1918 - 1933*, Band 3, Abschnitt VI, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (München: Bernhard & Graefe Verlag, 1983), 119.

including frequent official and unofficial access to one of Germany's most powerful personalities.<sup>99</sup> Some months later, the ambitious major presented his own political program.

### **C. WORLD WAR I AND SCHLEICHER'S MENTORS**

Geoffrey Preaut Megargee understands Schleicher as one of several Prusso-German officers who were technocrats and "came to believe that their control over events was greater than it really was, that they could manage a war as they could a railroad timetable, and that they could overcome any obstacle through sheer force of character."<sup>100</sup>

The general staff had incorrectly prepared for the total war that followed in the late summer of 1914 though, including the over emphasis on maneuver and decisive battle. Thus, World War I paved the way for Schleicher's increasing influence and his political ambitions in the political chaos that eventuated from the miscalculations of staff officers and their attempt to master the imponderables of the expansion of war. The experience of the war, including the predominance of the General Staff, also shaped his political expectations and aims.

#### **1. Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff**

Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff were German soldiers in politics who played fateful roles in imperial Germany as well as in the Weimar Republic. Both generals are significantly responsible for Germany's failure in 1918 as well as for the rise of Hitler's Nazi movement and Germany's 20th-century disaster

As member of the 3rd Army Supreme Command, Schleicher served close to Hindenburg and Ludendorff, and there exist no indications that he ever questioned his loyalty to these famous generals, celebrated in 1917 and 1918 as saviors of the nation.

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<sup>99</sup> Wolfram Pyta, *Hindenburg—Herrschaft zwischen Hohenzollern und Hitler*, (München: Pantheon, 2009), 566–567.

<sup>100</sup> Geoffrey Preaut Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command* (Kansas: Kansas University Press, 2000), 10.

From 1916, Hindenburg and Ludendorff were on top of the German chain of command, because the emperor acted neither as Germany's commander-in-chief nor as its civilian political leader.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, "[t]he very basis of the Prusso-German empire, the power of the Kaiser as War Lord, disappeared as soon as war broke out for, as though distrustful of his own capacity to command, William II made little effort to control military policy."<sup>102</sup> Therefore, 1916 and 1917, Germany witnessed a competition about political power between the General Staff and the parliament, and "William II hovered ... between submission to the Supreme Army Command and submission to the majority in the *Reichstag*."<sup>103</sup>

The casualties and shortages that the war caused brought severe suffering among Germany's domestic population, and the "circumstances on the home front soon deteriorated. Food supplies became a problem as early as in 1915. In April 1917 the first major strikes occurred, a consequence of the cutting of bread rations."<sup>104</sup> Hindenburg and Ludendorff gave scant consideration to the people's suffering in Germany, the so-called *Heimatfront*, or the difficult domestic political and economic situation. They also overlooked the increasing skepticism among German soldiers and civilians with respect to the war. As late as the summer of 1918, Hindenburg still spouted escapist optimism and protected Ludendorff—who was mainly responsible for the German General Staff's fateful misdirection—from criticism.<sup>105</sup> Both generals quashed every option for potential peace negotiations.

Civilian chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg more or less adhered to constitutional prerogatives and the primacy of the political in the best sense in the face of military radicalization amid stalemate. For their part, Hindenburg and Ludendorff regarded the monarchy in general and the political power of the military in particular as endangered

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<sup>101</sup> Haffner, *Von Bismarck zu Hitler*, 135.

<sup>102</sup> Passant, *Germany 1815–1945*, 144.

<sup>103</sup> Haffner, *Von Bismarck zu Hitler*, 134–135. (Wilhelm II. schwankte ... zwischen Unterwerfung unter die Oberste Heeresleitung und Unterwerfung unter die Reichstagsmehrheit.)

<sup>104</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 22.

<sup>105</sup> Pyta, *Hindenburg*, 328–334.

through domestic democratic as well as socialist movements. After Bethmann-Hollweg tried to balance the bottom-up political pressure and introduced his ideas of political reform (for example, the abolition of the Prussian three-class electoral system and the introduction of a universal franchise) in February and April 1917, Hindenburg and Ludendorff regarded him as enemy. “It is not difficult to imagine the effect of these steps upon an officer corps which was generally conservative in its political views, which had long fought against the increase of parliamentary powers and which ... was so fearful of democracy that it was already seeking to indoctrinate troops with the idea that the proponents of reform on the home front were as much Germany’s enemies as were her foreign foes.”<sup>106</sup> Moreover, the military could count on the emperor’s support, since “arguments of military expediency were generally, in crucial matters, given more weight than political considerations.”<sup>107</sup> Eventually, Hindenburg and Ludendorff seized the opportunity of the emperor’s weakness and implemented a military dictatorship of the so-called *Dritte Oberste Heeresleitung* in the epoch after 1916. Thereafter, “[c]ivilian government broke down with the resignation of the moderate Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg in July 1917 ... .”<sup>108</sup>

After “the fall of the civilian Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg was engineered by the [army’s] High Command, the subsequent military dictatorship of Hindenburg and Ludendorff was supported by a powerful organization, ... which represented all strata of society but probably drew the bulk of its support from the lower middle classes.”<sup>109</sup> Bethmann vainly attempted to bring about peace negotiations, and “[t]he failure of the Chancellor’s peace overtures weakened his prestige in governmental circles, a fact which was noted with satisfaction by the Supreme Command.”<sup>110</sup> It is notable that “Bethmann was brought down by the right, not the left, by soldiers, not party leaders.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 323.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 327.

<sup>108</sup> Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 22.

<sup>109</sup> Howard, *War in European History*, 112.

<sup>110</sup> Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 318.

<sup>111</sup> Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century*, 487.

The 3rd Army Supreme Command functioned as German government, however, according to Wiegand Schmidt-Richberg, “Hindenburg was basically not of a political nature, [he was] just soldier, who was rooted in the monarchic-conservative views of the Prussian officer. Whatever foreign or domestic political problems confronted him, he faced them with his soldierly attitude, essentially without deeper insight in complex contexts.”<sup>112</sup> Wolfram Pyta emphasizes that Hindenburg demonstrated a clear view of his own skills and of Germany’s domestic power-political circumstances. The field marshal was well aware of his lack of aptitude for managing complicated political affairs, and, first and foremost, he made no secret of his aversion to the parliament. Therefore, Hindenburg did not aim to become chancellor, because this position would have forced him to cooperate with constitutional elements, resulting in a limitation of his power as military dictator that allowed him to govern without institutional constraints. Furthermore, as chancellor he would have had to deal with a parliament, in which—since the 1912 elections—the Social Democratic Party, the (Catholic) German Center Party, and the left-wing Liberals had a comfortable majority. These parties’ goals differed significantly from Hindenburg’s political convictions.<sup>113</sup>

Whereas Hindenburg showed a talent for self-promotion and the reputation as a gentleman of leisure but a lack of military-tactical understanding, Ludendorff demonstrated his excellent military-tactical and organizational skills, as well as his industry and cunning.<sup>114</sup> In contrast to Hindenburg, who adapted himself, at least outwardly, to the new political circumstances, Ludendorff, instead, chose a path of radicalization that ended in the realm of the berserk: “He began ... to search for hidden powers which must in some sinister way have made his perfect plans ineffective. Thus it was that he turned his back on the civilized tradition of his time and began those dark

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<sup>112</sup> Schmidt-Richberg, *Deutsche Militärgeschichte in sechs Bänden 1618–1939*, 147. (Hindenburg war an und für sich keine politische Natur, nur Soldat, den in der monarchisch-konservativen Anschauungen des preußischen Offiziers wurzelte. Den an ihn herangetragenen außen- und innenpolitischen Problemen stand er mit seiner soldatischen Sinnesart im Grunde ohne tiefere Einsicht in die verwickelten Zusammenhänge gegenüber.)

<sup>113</sup> Pyta, *Hindenburg*, 265–266.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 44–52.



meditations on the secret behind the secrets, the hidden powers of Jews, Freemasons and Jesuits.”<sup>115</sup> These dark fears, in turn, undergirded his further political development away from democracy or peace.

Although the Great War ended with Germany’s defeat and the infamous Treaty of Versailles, Hindenburg’s reputation did not significantly suffer in the wider public because of the nimbus of 1914 and the transformations of state and society of total war. On the one hand, the German public believed that Ludendorff was responsible for the mistakes during the decisive German offensive that began in March 1918 and the military’s failure in general. On the other hand, Hindenburg organized the return of the army after the war ended and the German Revolution occurred in November 1918. His symbolic strength, which filled a void left by the collapse of the Hohenzollerns, emboldened him to act as facilitator during Germany’s transition from imperial monarchy to republic, and his fame fulfilled the imperial desires of large parts of Germany’s population after the emperor had resigned.<sup>116</sup>

To deflect or diminish their own responsibility in particular and the army’s failure in general, Hindenburg and Ludendorff successfully created and implemented the myth that domestic circumstances and not the army’s failure led to the defeat. Thus, as Mary Fulbrook stated, “[t]he Army High Command now felt that it would be advisable to hand over power to a civilian administration: Army leaders—who were already propagating the myth of a ‘stab in the back’, the betrayal of an undefeated Germany by Jews and Bolsheviks at home, an enemy within—preferred that a civilian government should have to shoulder the opprobrium of accepting national defeat.”<sup>117</sup> This myth played a fateful role with regard to Hitler’s gain of political power in 1933 and Germany’s collapse twelve years later. Moreover, “[i]t was fashionable in Weimar Germany to blame most of the country’s economic and financial problems on the Treaty of Versailles.”<sup>118</sup> Both

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<sup>115</sup> Goerlitz, *History of The German General Staff*, 202.

<sup>116</sup> Pyta, *Hindenburg*, 325–335.

<sup>117</sup> Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 23.

<sup>118</sup> Orlow, *Weimar Prussia 1925–1933*, 116.

trends became major burdens for the young democracy's domestic politics and foreign affairs, but they were first and foremost a punchy argument for the republic's enemies.

## 2. Wilhelm Groener

Wilhelm Groener was Schleicher's mentor and a key figure in imperial Germany as well as in the Weimar Republic. According to Johannes Hürter, Groener demonstrated the "military expertise and political understanding ... of a political soldier who expanded his functional mission and—at a time of political crisis—decisively influenced the [German] state's internal affairs development."<sup>119</sup> Moreover, "Groener had a keener eye for political essentials and a broader view than Schleicher."<sup>120</sup> In October 1918, he replaced Ludendorff in the 3rd Army Supreme Command. In this function, Groener and Schleicher created "the strange alliance between the General Staff and the People's Deputies which guarded the cradle of the German republic."<sup>121</sup> The Social Democrat Friedrich Ebert, Germany's political leader after the emperor's abdication in November 1918, and Groener sought to thwart Bolshevism in Germany and, therefore, implemented the Ebert-Groener pact.

The result was that Groener in his role as "the head of the First Quartermaster-General's department now gained a new importance as a sort of political Chief of Staff"<sup>122</sup> in Germany. His goals were to prevent Germany's fragmentation, to suppress domestic revolutionary developments, and to maintain the military's political power.<sup>123</sup> Therefore, he "offered Ebert the support of the army in maintaining law and order and suppressing revolutionary uprisings; Ebert accepted."<sup>124</sup> At that time, "[i]t was Groener and Schleicher who ... acted as the General Staff's spokesmen, Groener acting in his

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<sup>119</sup> Hürter, *Wilhelm Groener*, 1. (militärische Kompetenz und politisches Verständnis ... des politischen Soldaten, der über seinen Fachauftrag hinausgriff und—jeweils in einer Krisensituation—entscheidenden Einfluß auf die innere Entwicklung des Staates nahm.)

<sup>120</sup> Eschenburg, *The Role of Personality*, 20.

<sup>121</sup> Goerlitz, *History of The German General Staff*, 206.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>123</sup> Hürter, *Wilhelm Groener*, 17–18.

<sup>124</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 26.

character of a friend of bourgeois democracy, while Schleicher was alert enough to see a chance for the Army's survival in new clothing."<sup>125</sup> Ebert understood the pact as "a prospect of armed support should the Spartacists try to overthrow him. But Groener, a far-sighted man, was also thinking of the future: in this way he could preserve the Officers' Corps and the General Staff, and save from the wreck of the imperial regime the most important element for Germany's future."<sup>126</sup>

Eventually, the Ebert-Groener pact significantly contributed to the stab-in-the-back myth, which, in its German variant after World War I, held that defeatist democratic politicians snatched defeat from the jaws of a victory that the German army was just about to deliver in the field. In December 1918, Ebert addressed in Berlin returning front soldiers as follows: "No enemy has overpowered you. Not until the superiority of men and material became overwhelming, *we* [the politicians] have given up the fight ... With uplifted head *you* can return."<sup>127</sup>

As one of the key players during the period of repercussions after the Great War, Groener significantly paved the way for Germany's later political developments and the tragic role of her soldiers in politics. In sum, "the political power that he maintained for the officers' corps beyond the end of war and revolution held dangers and became a burden for the young republic."<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Goerlitz, *History of The German General Staff*, 207.

<sup>126</sup> A. J. Ryder, *Twentieth-Century Germany: From Bismarck to Brandt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 190.

<sup>127</sup> Haffner, *Von Bismarck zu Hitler*, 170. (Kein Feind hat Euch überwunden. Erst als die Übermacht der Gegner an Menschen und Material immer drückender wurde, haben *wir* den Kampf aufgegeben ... Erhobenen Hauptes könnt *ihr* zurückkehren.)

<sup>128</sup> Hürter, *Wilhelm Groener*, 19. (barg die politische Macht, die er dem Offizierskorps über Kriegsende und Revolution bewahrt hatte, Gefahren in sich und wurde zu einer Hypothek für die junge Republik.)

## D. CONCLUSION

With regard to foreign and domestic political affairs, Germany's situation went from bad to worse and perhaps a little further within four years, when its isolation in the international system morphed into a worldwide enemy coalition that included the United States. Eventually, Germany lost territory, population, and economy, and the German military—the nation's pride since the victory over France in 1871—found itself dramatically limited through the Treaty of Versailles—at least officially. During World War I, on the one hand, “the General Staff began to occupy in the national life as a whole, and the steady extension of its activities for the General Staff was already concerning itself with such matters as the press, films, general propaganda, armaments and food.”<sup>129</sup> After 1918, on the other hand, Germany's military elite, especially the members of the General Staff, faced a significantly different state and society than four years before.

Within the same period, Schleicher's world also had been turned upside down in the young Republic wracked by postwar chaos. Germany was neither an imperial monarchy nor independent with respect to its foreign affairs. He could barely recognize the society that struggled out of the privations and suffering. In November 1918, sailors of the German navy, the emperor's pride, revolted during the Kiel mutiny, which event significantly contributed to the abdication of Wilhelm II. Democrats and socialists were struggling for political power and proclaimed two different German republics on 9 November 1918 in Berlin. Moreover, Germany faced the loss of two million fallen soldiers as well as 2.7 million physically wounded or traumatized citizens.<sup>130</sup> Domestically, the old Wilhelmine order disappeared, and civil war swept the streets. The nation's economic situation was disastrous, and, finally, Germany lost her overseas colonies.

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<sup>129</sup> Goerlitz, *History of The German General Staff*, 182.

<sup>130</sup> Deutsches Historisches Museum, “1914–18—Tod und Verwundung,” <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/wk1/kriegsverlauf/tod/>, accessed May 3, 2013.

In such circumstances, it is not surprising that Schleicher created his own political ambitions right after the war. In his perception, the nation faced a collapse of everything that he formerly understood as being essential for Germany's power and future: strong autocratic (monarchic) leadership, economic power, military strength, influential elites (nobility), and significant military influence in governmental affairs. All this had—in Schleicher's view—to be maintained, respectively, at least to be restored.

#### IV. POLITICS AFTER THE WAR AND THE BIRTH OF THE YOUNG DEMOCRACY—REICHSWEHR AND REPUBLIC

On 18 January 1919, 48 years after the proclamation of the German *Kaiserreich* in the same place, 27 victorious states—led by the United States, Great Britain, France, and Italy—met in Versailles to conduct negotiations about the Great War’s consequences. Austria and Germany faced severe penalties, calculated both to punish the putative aggressors and to stymie future war production, broadly conceived. Germany lost 13 percent of its territory, 15 percent of agricultural areas, 10 percent of its population, as well as significant mining and industrial capacities. Moreover, 90 percent of the German mercantile marine and 25 percent of the high-sea fleet sailed from now on under a foreign flag. The expropriation of Germany’s public and private foreign capital as well as the annulment of international patent law and copyright regimes for German companies spelled bitter disadvantages for international business activities.

With regard to the military, Germany was allowed to maintain a professional army of 100,000 soldiers and a navy with a strength of 15,000. Battle tanks, submarines, and any semblance of an air force were prohibited. Furthermore, allied troops occupied Germany’s territory west of the Rhine, while on the eastern bank a demilitarized zone extended 50 kilometers. Germany remained notwithstanding significantly militarized. The official *Reichswehr* troops faced several activities to counterbalance its numeric disadvantage and retain a broad spectrum of military skills: “Thus, from September 1921 onwards all members of transport units were unofficially trained as artillerymen.”<sup>131</sup>

Based on a deal with the Army Supreme Command, armed *Freikorps* were established. Approximately 120 *Freikorps* with 400,000 members existed.<sup>132</sup> These were “units of volunteers, organised [*sic*] by senior officers and n.c.o.s straight from the

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<sup>131</sup> Goerlitz, *History of The German General Staff*, 224.

<sup>132</sup> Deutsches Historisches Museum, 1918–1933—*Freikorps*, <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/weimar/gewalt/freikorps/>, accessed May 8, 2013.

front.”<sup>133</sup> Many of them “had been brutalised [*sic*] by the war and new no other trade. Their politics ... were crudely nationalist.”<sup>134</sup> The *Freikorps* were one of several examples of Germany’s violation of the Treaty of Versailles and its tough conditions. Indeed, these paramilitary units “formed the basis of the *Reichswehr*, which thus from the beginning acquired an anti-republican spirit”<sup>135</sup>

Other paramilitary units besides the *Freikorps* arose, as well. For example, “within the Berlin-Brandenburg Military District, [there arose] the 20,000-strong force of [blue-collar] *Arbeits-Kommandos*—later to become known as the ‘Black Reichswehr’—in which future Chancellor Kurt von Schleicher had a hand.”<sup>136</sup> Remarkably, “[t]hese units ... were paid and supported partially from *Reichswehr* funds, and partly from donations by the industrial and agrarian organizations to which these battalions were assigned.”<sup>137</sup> Thus, civilian elites like entrepreneurs and land holders—not necessarily Germany’s most democratic milieus—played a key role in Germany’s hidden military activities.

The German government and the population perceived these conditions as unfair but, eventually, Berlin accepted the Treaty of Versailles, which became effective on 10 January 1920. The Versailles *Diktat*, as the agreement came to be known in Germany in part because the terms were literally dictated to the German delegation at the end of the process, seemed like the least awful of several bad possibilities. Groener, for instance, assessed any military opposition as unwinnable. More broadly, a potential occupation of the whole nation was imminent.<sup>138</sup>

These external circumstances only exacerbated the pressure on Germany’s democratic civilian leaders, who nonetheless sought stability and peace with key Western

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<sup>133</sup> Ryder, *Twentieth-Century Germany*, 194.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>136</sup> Passant, *Germany 1815–1945*, 165.

<sup>137</sup> Dupuy, *A Genius for War*, 211.

<sup>138</sup> Ursula Büttner, *Weimar—Die überforderte Republik 1918–1933—Leistung und Versagen in Staat, Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft und Kultur* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008), 128.

players. However, nationalistic and conservative German circles, including Schleicher, successfully championed the understanding that it was not the defeat in World War I as such but the Treaty of Versailles that caused the bitter suffering of Germany's population.<sup>139</sup>

#### **A. WEIMAR AND ITS (EARLY) DISCONTENTS**

The foundation of the democratic Weimar Republic<sup>140</sup> as well as the Treaty of Versailles did not result in a stabilization of Germany's domestic political situation at all. Until 1923, the existence of the young state was endangered through political rivalries as well as through severe economic and social problems. Furthermore, France maintained its pressure on the government in Berlin to fulfill or even increase the reparations for World War I.<sup>141</sup>

Millions of families suffered with fallen or wounded fathers, brothers, and sons. During the war, women had to replace male workers who fought at the front. Gender roles had turned, and millions of returning soldiers—shouldering the horrible experiences of a total war and facing the disastrous repercussions of their formerly proud and great nation—had to be re-integrated into Germany's society and economy, as damaged as both were. During and after the war, the overwhelming concern of millions of Germans was to satisfy their hunger and to survive. During hyperinflation in October 1923, malnutrition was a common phenomenon, and the city of Hamburg, for example, could only provide 50 percent of the weekly needed breadstuff for its population. Strikes, revolts, as well as plundering occurred. Large parts of the population saw no alternative to conducting criminal activities—for example smuggling or trading on the black market—to relieve the distress. Social conflict between interest groups occurred—rural populations versus city dwellers, white collar versus blue collar, consumers versus

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<sup>139</sup> Ursula Büttner, *Weimar—Die überforderte Republik*, 129.

<sup>140</sup> The new constitution was adopted on 11 August 1919.

<sup>141</sup> Eberhard Kolb and Dirk Schumann, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 8th ed. (München: Oldenbourg, 2013), 37.



producers. These tensions and the zero-sum mentality that went with them posed a grave and constant danger to the authority of the democratic state and its representatives.<sup>142</sup>

## 1. Difficult Economic Conditions

A disastrous inflation, a war-weakened economy—the German industrial production in 1919 had fallen back to the level of 1888<sup>143</sup>—as well as severe reparations were a challenging economic burden for the young republic. Germany faced a disastrous inflation, and millions of German people lost their savings. This development caused not just economic but also social repercussions: “Although the specific effects of inflation to particular social ranks have been by no means sufficiently examined, so far, there is no doubt that inflation made broad parts of the bourgeois middle class economically proletarian.”<sup>144</sup> Millions of Germans embraced political radicalization or, at least, they became susceptible for extreme—notably anti-liberal respectively anti-democratic—political positions.

Because Germany had lost its mining capacities in the Ruhr, coal imports became necessary, financed by already extremely limited resources of foreign currencies. In 1923, Germany’s earning covered only one seventh part of its spending, and the inflation developed rapidly: In December 1922, the exchange rate for one U.S. dollar was 8,000 German marks; in April 1923, 20,000 marks; and in August 1923, as high as 1 million marks.<sup>145</sup> The government initiated a monetary reform, resulting in the implementation of the *Rentenmark* in November 1923. This step was essential for the nation’s economic recovery, which began 1924—more than five years after the armistice ended the war.

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<sup>142</sup> Büttner, *Weimar—Die überforderte Republik*, 178–179.

<sup>143</sup> Deutsches Historisches Museum, “1918–1933—Industrie und Wirtschaft,” <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/weimar/industrie/>, accessed May 4, 2013.

<sup>144</sup> Horst Möller, *Die Weimarer Republik—Eine unvollendete Demokratie*, 10th ed. (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2012), 166. (Wenngleich die spezifischen Auswirkungen der Inflation auf die einzelnen sozialen Schichten noch keineswegs zureichend untersucht sind, so besteht doch kein Zweifel, daß die Inflation breite bürgerliche Mittelschichten ökonomisch proletarisierte.)

<sup>145</sup> Kolb, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 52.

Of the German population's daily life in the early 1920s, Mary Fulbrook describes: "Paper notes were simply stamped with a new increased value; people were paid their wages by the cartload; prices doubled and trebled several times a day, making shopping with money almost impossible; and the savings, hopes, plans, assumptions and aspirations of huge numbers of people were swept away in a chaotic whirlwind."<sup>146</sup> In parallel, there were significant numbers of Germans who truly benefitted from these economic circumstances. These inflation winners' luxury lifestyle and their gormandizing were a severe provocation for the starving masses: "The unimaginably large contrast between undeserved prosperity and extreme material poverty had to result in social resentments and to pave a broad fundament for criticism on the capitalistic economic system."<sup>147</sup> This social turbulence had continuing consequences for Germany's political development, and "[e]ven when the worst material impact was over [after 1924], the psychological shock of the experience was to have longer-lasting effects, confirming a deep-seated dislike of democracy"<sup>148</sup> as well as skepticism toward capitalism.

The reparations were bitter and painful, but they were not the main source for the difficult economic situation and the disastrous inflation. Some scholars emphasize that until 1922 the inflation even energized Germany's economy and resulted in almost full employment—whereas England, for instance, faced an unemployment rate of approximately 20 percent in 1921.<sup>149</sup> Inflation and reparations, however, offered an excellent fundament from which to shift the responsibility for Germany's struggling from domestic political protagonists and decisions—for instance, the failure to initiate a negotiation peace in 1916/1917—to foreign powers like the allies or other assumedly influencing players like the Jews. German nationalistic circles developed the legend of an international finance-market Jewry (*Internationales Finanzjudentum*) that ruled the world

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<sup>146</sup> Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 34.

<sup>147</sup> Hans Mommsen, *Aufstieg und Untergang der Republik von Weimar—1918–1933*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Ullstein, 2009), 177. (Der unvorstellbar große Kontrast zwischen unverdientem Wohlstand und äußerster materieller Not mußte sozialen Ressentiments und der Kritik am kapitalistischen Wirtschaftssystem einen breiten Nährboden verschaffen.)

<sup>148</sup> Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 34.

<sup>149</sup> Kolb, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 203–204.

and that was accountable for the nation's suffering.<sup>150</sup> Large parts of the German elites, especially the military, believed and advanced this blaming of external powers, and, potentially without foresighted intention, "[t]hese were the people who later turned to Adolf Hitler as the messiah to lead them out of financial chaos."<sup>151</sup>

## **2. Domestic Political Rivalries**

From the very beginning, the young republic faced organizations and movements that aimed at eliminating the parliamentary democracy. Weimar's enemies contained of left- and right-wingers who fought a battle against the political system on the whole. Whereas the right-minded aimed at restoring the pre-democratic monarchy or a post-democratic authoritarian Germany, left groups targeted on the dictatorship of the proletariat. Right-wing circles used the stab-in-the-back myth to exonerate imperial Germany—and especially the leading figures—from the responsibility for the nation's disaster. In the process, this myth—developed by Hindenburg and Ludendorff and broadly used by Germany's military and conservative elites—became a dagger at the throat of the Weimar Republic.<sup>152</sup>

During the first years following World War I, Germany did not enjoy peace at home but instead roiled with incidents of partisan violence tantamount to civil war. Riots and civil commotion as well as state of emergency were the rule in postwar Germany. Whereas the centrists in and around the young government sought to stabilize the fledgling democracy, extremists on the left and the right conducted armed revolts, murdered opponents, and implemented illegal governmental structures. The streets of the capital were particularly savage. For example, in 1920, socialist and communist protesters attempted to penetrate the legislative building in Berlin. Forty-two left-wingers were killed by the police.

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<sup>150</sup> Möller, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 147.

<sup>151</sup> Snyder, *The Weimar Republic*, 55.

<sup>152</sup> Büttner, *Weimar—Die überforderte Republik*, 37–39.

A major incident initiated by the far right was the *Kapp-Putsch*. Supported by anti-republican *Freikorps* and *Reichswehr* forces, Wolfgang Kapp, a German civil servant and nationalist, initiated a rebellion against the democratic government in March 1920. Due to the strength and equipment of these forces, the government tried to convince military leaders in Berlin to maintain or restore the republican order. The putsch lasted only four days after the legitimate government had left Berlin and Kapp's supporters had declared his chancellorship. Eventually, the rebellion "was ... brought down by a general strike,<sup>153</sup> after the army had refused to fire on the putschist troops."<sup>154</sup>

Primarily responsible for the military's scant support for the democratic government was Hans von "Seeckt, chief of the *Truppenamt* and, in effect, chief of staff of the army. Seeckt's attitude was summed up in the words: "Troops do not fire on troops. Do you perhaps intend ... that a battle fought ... between troops who have fought side by side against the common enemy? ... When *Reichswehr* fires on *Reichswehr*, then all comradeship within the officer corps has vanished."<sup>155</sup> It is, on the one hand, remarkable that "[t]he putsch was defeated by two principal forms of resistance: the general strike of the workers and the refusal of the higher civil servants to collaborate with their rebel masters."<sup>156</sup> The putsch posed a particular problem—and a particular solution—to the imperially minded Seeckt, and, with regard to the general's desire to maintain the imperial army's spirit, "the *Truppenamt* ... was unofficially the carrier of the Great General Staff's tradition, and it was in point of fact not long before it turned into much the same kind of school of uniform operational thought ... ." <sup>157</sup>

Seeckt's behavior, on the other hand, "brutally exposed the helplessness of the nation's government and president and had served to destroy the people's faith in their Army."<sup>158</sup> He demonstrated several times his willingness to defeat leftists' rebellion as

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<sup>153</sup> Initiated by Germany's Social Democratic Party.

<sup>154</sup> Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 32.

<sup>155</sup> Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 377.

<sup>156</sup> Erich Eyck, *A History of the Weimar Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 151.

<sup>157</sup> Goerlitz, *History of The German General Staff*, 225.

<sup>158</sup> Eyck, *A History of the Weimar Republic*, 154.

well as “his belief in the efficacy of ‘national thinking’, his antagonism to social democracy, [and] his antipathy to the constitution ... .”<sup>159</sup> When the *Kapp-Putsch* occurred, the legitimate president and chancellor were Social Democrats and, in Seeckt’s view, opponents, since he “was seriously considering the possibility of taking power into his own hands, either by way of military dictatorship or in the form of a Seeckt chancellorship.”<sup>160</sup> The *Reichswehr* was indeed led by a potential rebel.

Left-wing activists also sought to eliminate the parliamentary democracy. Several strikes and armed rebellions shook the Weimar Republic from its left fringe, as well. Following the Kapp-Putsch, a force of up to 50,000 leftist combatants (“*Rote Ruhrarmee*”) fought against the nationalistic *Freikorps*, temporarily occupied large parts in western Germany (Ruhr), and implemented local workers’ councils as political institutions. It was a fight between nationalistic conservative and working class extremists, and the liberal democratic parties suffered from these dangerous repercussions. The government in Berlin fell back on the army as well as on *Freikorps* forces to establish law and order and to put down the revolt. Immediately after the military had denied defending the republic against right-wingers, the German army was indispensable to prevent socialist revolution. Eventually, the Kapp-Putsch resulted in a severe imbalance within Germany’s political structure and democratic procedures.<sup>161</sup>

## **B. CONSTITUTIONAL WEAKNESSES**

In the event, the turmoil in Berlin drove the young German republic’s founding leaders to seek the relative quiet of Weimar, a resort town some distance south of the capital, to draft the constitution. The resulting document marked an ambitious proclamation of liberal ideals for a polity that had little real experience with democratic practice. Louis Leo Snyder understood the Weimar constitution as “a letter-perfect document embodying the best features of the British Bill of Rights, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, and the first Ten Amendments of the

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<sup>159</sup> Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 417.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Büttner, *Weimar—Die überforderte Republik*, 143–145.

American constitution.”<sup>162</sup> Nevertheless, a number of weaknesses in the Weimar constitution and the politics that ensued ultimately resulted in the destruction of Germany’s first democracy through right-wing nationalistic powers.

It is, on the one hand, remarkable that, after the first years’ repercussions, the Weimar Republic faced a period of political stability, economic recovery, and—with regard to foreign affairs—Germany’s gradual reintegration in the international system. On the other hand, the constitution contained—besides domestic right- and left-wing anti-democratic movements—dangerous vulnerabilities. In Hans Mommsen’s view, one of the key issues was the lack of a true unity between ruling and governing powers (*Staat*) and the society. He compares the constitution’s development progress with legislation processes in imperial Germany. This top-down approach—mainly executed by high-ranking public servants—did not sufficiently involve political parties respectively the people’s will.<sup>163</sup> Eventually, “[t]he Republic’s fatal lack of legitimacy caused people to look all too readily to other political solutions for Germany’s ills.”<sup>164</sup>

For one thing, the new constitution did not specify a minimum threshold of votes for parties to become a member of the parliament.<sup>165</sup> Because any party that could scrape together some support could—and did—enter parliament, the German legislature was fractured on even its best days. From 1919 until 1933, 11 parties gained governmental power, and from the first cabinet (13 February–20 June 1919) until Schleicher’s chancellorship (3 December 1932–28 January 1933) as many as 20 different cabinets existed.<sup>166</sup> The republic was constantly suffering from these unsteady circumstances at the top of the governmental process.

Another weakness of the Weimar constitution was the overwhelmingly powerful position of the president. Based on the goal to prevent disproportionate power by the

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<sup>162</sup> Snyder, *The Weimar Republic*, 40.

<sup>163</sup> Mommsen, *Aufstieg und Untergang der Republik von Weimar*, 83.

<sup>164</sup> Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 451.

<sup>165</sup> In contrast to the five-percent hurdle that exists in Germany today.

<sup>166</sup> Deutsches Historisches Museum, “1918–1933—Kabinette von 1919–1933,” <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/weimar/verfassung/kabinette/>, accessed May 5, 2013.

parliament and political parties, the president should serve as a counter-balancing element. In practice, however, his power led to an ill-functioning parliamentarianism, since political parties as well as members of parliament tended to excessively rely on the president's solutions and actions in times of political crises.<sup>167</sup> The president had the authority to dissolve the parliament and, moreover, a significant option for misuse was "Article 48 of the Weimar constitution ... which gave the president the power to rule by decree in time of emergency ... ." <sup>168</sup> In the wrong hands, this article could result in cutting off all democratic institutions, and it had, indeed, "never been intended to be the basis for any more than purely interim measures; [however,] the Nazis made it into the basis for a permanent state of emergency that was more fictive than real and lasted in a technical sense all the way up to 1945."<sup>169</sup>

Furthermore, the Germans elected the president directly for a seven-year term. Candidates depended neither on a parliamentary majority nor on a leading position as functionary in one of the major parties. From this office, powerful but unconnected to representative politics, Hindenburg returned to power, now as a civilian—and the thin edge of an anti-democratic wedge in Berlin. That is, despite the disastrous end of the war and its calamitous repercussions, "[t]he advent of an old-line militarist [Hindenburg in 1925] to the presidency—an event of incalculable importance—was made possible by the least politically minded fringe of the German electorate. These people were not greatly concerned about constitutional or ideological questions; they were swayed, first and foremost, by their adoration of the man."<sup>170</sup> The 77-year-old general field marshal fulfilled the desires for leadership and strength that large numbers of Hindenburg's supporters had in their hearts and minds when they recalled imperial Germany.

With regard to these desires, it is not surprising that, when Hindenburg arrived in Berlin after his election, he "was received ... with a tumultuous welcome. The flags

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<sup>167</sup> Büttner, *Weimar—Die überforderte Republik*, 114–115.

<sup>168</sup> Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 453.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Halperin, *Germany Tried Democracy*, 319–320.

displayed were the black-white-red banners of the Empire,”<sup>171</sup> but also the black-red-golden ones of the republic.<sup>172</sup> Eventually, “[t]he 1925 presidential elections demonstrated the discontent with the republic and were perceived as stabilizing reversion to the pre-revolutionary time.”<sup>173</sup> Moreover, Hindenburg’s election opened a unique chance for Germany’s military elite in general and Kurt von Schleicher in particular: Suddenly, the restoration of their beloved autocratic order, including significant military influence in governmental affairs, seemed within reach.

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<sup>171</sup> Snyder, *The Weimar Republic*, 70.

<sup>172</sup> Pyta, *Hindenburg*, 484–485.

<sup>173</sup> Möller, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 216. (Die Reichspräsidentenwahlen von 1925 bestätigten die Unzufriedenheit mit der Republik und erschienen als stabilisierende Rückwendung zur vorrevolutionären Zeit.)



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## V. CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN WEIMAR AND SCHLEICHER'S INCREASING POLITICAL INFLUENCE

The early years of the Weimar Republic's civil-military relations were characterized by the process whereby the army had transferred itself into the new republic without either having engaged in the fundamental reforms needed to secure the place of the soldier in the constitution. That is, the civilian government and the *Reichswehr* operated in parallel existence. Most importantly, the General Staff retained its nationalistic, monarchic, as well as militaristic attitude; viewed the democratic republic with skepticism; and had defied efforts at democratic civilian control.

Whereas diversified political parties and their protagonists sought genuine improvements to the nation's difficult situation, the military focused solely on its own power, influence, and interests—which it perceived as coinciding with or leading the national interest as the state superior to mass politics. It acted disconnectedly from Germany's governmental activities—in some connections, even illegally. The *Reichswehr* did not serve as a politically neutral supporter and protector of the constitution and its democratic elements but perpetually sought to steer, if not control, German domestic and international politics. This effort became closely associated with Kurt von Schleicher.

Schleicher played a key role in this process during the Weimar Republic—and its demise. A remarkable post-World War I career allowed him to increase steadily his influence in German politics. Schleicher's responsibilities and authorities constantly shifted from military affairs to political questions. Like Hindenburg, “[w]hat Schleicher wanted was power without responsibility,”<sup>174</sup> but, eventually, he became a member of the German government.

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<sup>174</sup> Halperin, *Germany Tried Democracy*, 409.

## A. THE ROLE OF THE GENERAL STAFF IN THE SHADOW OF WEIMAR AND VERSAILLES 1919–1933

After the Kapp Putsch in 1920, the *Reichswehr* significantly strengthened its influence in governmental affairs. Moreover, the army's self-perception as a decisive power in Germany as well as its anti-republican attitude put the civilian president in the role of a commander-in-chief who depended on the favor of his military elites. Led by Hans von Seeckt, the military's goal was "the preservation of the Army's integrity"<sup>175</sup> as well as to establish a state within the state for a time once the republic had ended and a new state would form with the army in its old position of authority. Therefore, the army clearly demonstrated anti-democratic attitudes, and "[m]any leading officers claimed that while they supported the German nation, they could not support the democratic state: thus, in the early years, in different ways, Generals Groener, Seeckt and others co-operated with right-wing groups and paramilitary organizations."<sup>176</sup> Furthermore, officers who had supported the putsch as well as soldiers who participated in that anti-republican revolt remained in service.<sup>177</sup> Especially Seeckt understood an apolitical *Reichswehr* in the way that active support of the republic had to be suppressed. As early as 1920, the German military had proved its failure with regard to the necessary ability and will to implement democratic attitudes.

The army concealed both forces and equipment after the Treaty of Versailles became effective—specifically to flout the terms of the agreement, which German military leaders viewed as illegitimate and dangerous. According to the Treaty's Article 160, the *Reichswehr* was to be "devoted exclusively to the maintenance of order within the territory and to the control of the frontiers."<sup>178</sup> This treaty's article, "which lent the

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<sup>175</sup> Goerlitz, *History of The German General Staff*, 221.

<sup>176</sup> Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 49.

<sup>177</sup> Heinrich August Winkler, *1918–1933—Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie*, 4th ed. (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2005), 136.

<sup>178</sup> Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library, The Avalon Project, The Versailles Treaty June 28, 1919: Part V, Article 160, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/partv.asp>, accessed May 11, 2013.

Reich's Army more the character of a police force, was never accepted in Germany,"<sup>179</sup> not least because it seemed to leave Germany helpless to counter any foreign aggression. These concerns existed with good cause, as Germany's neighbors were restive. The hostile mood proved useful for Seeckt: "Taking advantage of the chauvinism displayed by the Poles in 1920 and 1921, he claimed that it was impossible to defend Germany's eastern frontiers with the 100,000-man army ... ."<sup>180</sup> Thus, from the very beginning of its existence, the *Reichswehr* organized various covert and semi covert measures to have militarily trained people and operational weapons available outside of its official structures.

In such circumstances, the secret military consolidation that the *Reichswehr* initiated is hardly surprising. It is striking, however, that several of these activities occurred without involving civilian governmental institutions—for example, "the hidden stocks of arms and equipment [*Zeugmeistereien*] in various parts of Germany, about which the civilian authorities, especially if they were known to be socialists or pacifists, were not informed."<sup>181</sup>

Seeckt's secret program was of enormous scope and scale: disguised training for pilots; secret research and work on tanks as well as guns by German industry. Foreign firms, for example in Finland, Holland, Spain, Sweden, and Turkey, secretly produced and tested weapons for Germany.<sup>182</sup> After the Treaty of Rapallo<sup>183</sup> in 1922, Russia became Germany's major partner for secret military activities. On the one hand, the *Reichswehr* conducted military exercises with tanks, air assets, and war gas—with regard to the Versailles Treaty illegal weapons. On the other hand, Soviet forces received German introductions in military training as well as in the functioning of the General

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<sup>179</sup> Wilhelm Deist, *The Wehrmacht [Italics] and German Rearmament*, Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 4.

<sup>180</sup> Passant, *Germany 1815–1945*, 164–165.

<sup>181</sup> Ryder, *Twentieth-Century Germany*, 215.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> The Treaty aimed at the normalization of the diplomatic relations between Germany and the Soviet Union and was designated to enable both nations to free from their international isolation after World War I.

Staff.<sup>184</sup> Tellingly, some of the bilateral “talks were held in the apartment of Major Schleicher, ... whose taste for conspiracy became unbridled ... .”<sup>185</sup>

This—officially non-existent—General Staff was the decisive body to plan, execute, and coordinate all these activities. Hence, “there had been a successful attempt to bring over as many competent General Staff officers as possible from the old Imperial Army into the *Reichswehr*—a fact which helped to preserve that continuity which to Seeckt was a matter of such vital importance.”<sup>186</sup> Continuity was a key issue for him, and, concerning the recruitment of promising officer candidates, his “personal preference was always for candidates who were of aristocratic birth and descended from the old military families ... .”<sup>187</sup>

### **1. Seeckt’s Leadership in State and Army**

Seeckt’s very “position of *Chef der Heeresleitung* ... was contrary to the Treaty, for the provisions of Versailles not only forbade the Great General Staff, they forbade the existence of a generalissimo.”<sup>188</sup> The victorious allies’ idea was a division of powers within the German military, and “[t]hey laid down that the command of the *Reichswehr* was to be in hands of a parliamentary War Minister who was to be civilian, and of two Group Commanders, each of whom was to have equal authority with the other.”<sup>189</sup> Seeckt successfully avoided this division of power. His position was uniquely powerful, and the strategy he developed rested on two major pillars: establishing and increasing his political influence and forming the “*Reichswehr* as the kernel of a future national Army.”<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Haffner, *Von Bismarck zu Hitler*, 185–186.

<sup>185</sup> Kitchen, *Military History of Germany*, 246.

<sup>186</sup> Goerlitz, *History of The German General Staff*, 225.

<sup>187</sup> Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 393–394.

<sup>188</sup> Goerlitz, *History of The German General Staff*, 222.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 223.

He and other members of the young democracy's military elite successfully resisted any real or abiding change of attitude vis-à-vis Weimar: "[U]nder General von Seeckt, ... from March 1920 to October 1926, most officers thought in terms of serving the state, not the republic ... ." <sup>191</sup> The general established unilateralist leanings and favored a decoupling of the German military from the legitimate government. Seeckt had, furthermore, direct access to the president and perceived himself—instead of the defense minister—as true spokesman for military affairs. After Hindenburg's election to president in 1925, however, Seeckt's position as the first soldier of the state diminished. This aspect caused, on the one hand, a rivalry with Seeckt who did not used to be awestruck when he met the matured World War I veteran. On the other hand, Hindenburg's new presidential power clearly decreased Seeckt's role and influence. <sup>192</sup>

With regard to his political activities, Seeckt perpetually failed to comply with the letter or the spirit of the constitution, and "[t]he frequent result was enmity between Seeckt and the civilian ministers in the Wilhelmstrasse and at the Defense Ministry in the Bendlerstrasse." <sup>193</sup> Eschenburg concludes that "[i]n any event, Seeckt found democratic government and its potential control of the army inimical." <sup>194</sup> The result was that the responsible ministers grew more and more tired of Seeckt's perception of the military's superiority over civilian attitudes. Moreover, his highhandedness and the illegal activities of the *Reichswehr* endangered their politics. <sup>195</sup>

Eventually, his conduct would cost him his job, once Hindenburg had become president of the republic. In 1926, Seeckt independently authorized the former crown prince's son to participate in a *Reichswehr* manoeuver. His decision was broadly perceived as an affront to the republic: "This was more serious, especially since ... the leftist and democratic press got wind of the matter and there was a storm of

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<sup>191</sup> Gaines Post, *The Civil-Military Fabric of Weimar Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 88.

<sup>192</sup> Pyta, *Hindenburg*, 513.

<sup>193</sup> Post, *Weimar Foreign Policy*, 91.

<sup>194</sup> Eschenburg, *Republic to Reich*, 18.

<sup>195</sup> Büttner, *Weimar—Die überforderte Republik*, 378.

indignation.”<sup>196</sup> Furthermore, the French minister of foreign affairs embarrassed his German colleague by warning him about illegal rearmament efforts in Germany’s forces and expressed his skepticism “concerning the German government’s ability to keep the military under control.”<sup>197</sup> Seeckt had significantly overstretched his authority with respect to domestic and foreign political affairs, and, eventually, “there was no alternative to demand for Seeckt’s resignation; and this was appreciated by all members of the government. ... Seeckt’s fall was greeted with enthusiasm in republican circles.”<sup>198</sup>

This victory for parliamentary control of the military, however, was somewhat illusory. The democrats could not implement significant changes in the armed forces, even with Seeckt gone. For instance, their efforts failed to end the military’s practice of hiring recruits and especially officers primarily from the conservative milieu.<sup>199</sup> Seven years of Seeckt’s leadership had already paved the way for anti-republican attitudes within the *Reichswehr* and fatal later developments. After Seeckt had left office, the army abandoned its course of strict separation from the republican government, and the way was clear “for a new concept of national defence which implied stronger co-operation between the *Reichswehr* and the State executive ... .”<sup>200</sup> This development was not solely of voluntary character. Domestic and foreign political pressure forced the military to inform the government about its hidden activities in February 1927.

## 2. Groener’s Vision

Another significant aspect was the *Reichswehr* leaders’ growing understanding concerning the essential role of modern economics and technology to maintain and develop adequate German military forces. It was Wilhelm Groener—minister of defense since 1928—who identified that Seeckt’s policy was a dead-end street.<sup>201</sup> He understood

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<sup>196</sup> Goerlitz, *History of The German General Staff*, 249.

<sup>197</sup> Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 422.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 422–423.

<sup>199</sup> Büttner, *Weimar—Die überforderte Republik*, 379.

<sup>200</sup> Deist, *The Wehrmacht*, 6.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 8–10.

that a holistic approach was indispensable, since “[a]n enforcement of ... armament could hardly be executed offside as before, but required the support and integration of the government, the economy, and the people.”<sup>202</sup> This new approach—shared by a reforming group of officers, either oriented to U.S. practice or that of the Soviet Union—became feasible, because Germany’s economy had developed quite well and the military saw a perspective to participate and to benefit: From 1924 until 1929, Germany paid 10 billion marks for reparations, but received loans of 25 billion marks from the United States. The nation’s merchandise export prospered as its industry modernized.<sup>203</sup>

Germany’s re-armament program was Groener’s major focus, and his broad military and political experience—from June 1920 to August 1923 he had functioned as crossbench minister of transportation—enabled him to implement major changes with regard to the Weimar Republic’s civil-military relations. Groener built a bridge between the military technocrats and the republican government. Probably, he was one of the very few German General Staff officers who truly included long-term strategic impacts: “In Germany, much more than in the Anglo-Saxon countries for example, the scope of the discussion was reduced to a consideration of operational warfare [that is, the operational level of war versus the strategic level]. This discussion revealed that the phenomenon of war between industrialized countries had become so complex and the preconditions and effects of such a war so difficult to estimate, that intellectual appraisal was limited to isolated aspects only.”<sup>204</sup>

On the one hand, Groener significantly contributed to the improvement of the Weimar Republic’s poor civil-military relations. He served the republic loyally; sincerely seeking to increase the nation’s military capabilities. He foresaw the requirements for comprehensive domestic as well as for politico-military approaches within Germany’s foreign affairs, in the epoch of Minister of Foreign Affairs Gustav Stresemann and the

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<sup>202</sup> Hürter, *Wilhelm Groener*, 38. (Eine Forcierung der personellen und materiellen Rüstungsmaßnahmen ließ sich aber kaum wie bisher im Abseits durchführen, sondern erforderte die Unterstützung und Mitwirkung der Regierung, der Wirtschaft und des Volkes.)

<sup>203</sup> Haffner, *Von Bismarck zu Hitler*, 193.

<sup>204</sup> Deist, *The Wehrmacht*, 8.



stabilization after the mid-1920s. On the other hand, his ideal was an authoritarian and centralized state with democratic as well as social elements. Groener did not show revanchist attitudes, but his political goal to revitalize Germany's great-power efforts demonstrates his revisionist character.<sup>205</sup> Wilhelm Deist concludes, that he "was certainly no democrat, as many of his contemporaries took him to be. He was a republican by reason rather than conviction (*Vernunftrepublikaner*), but there were few enough even of these in the higher officer corps ... ." <sup>206</sup>

With regard to Schleicher's political ambitions and activities, Groener's mandate as minister of defense was a development with historic consequences. Now—henceforth in influential functions in Berlin—"Hindenburg, Groener, and ... Schleicher, the decisive people in power of the Army Supreme Command in 1918/19, were unified again."<sup>207</sup>

## **B. SCHLEICHER'S POLITICAL ACTIVITIES**

On 20 December 1918, Kurt von Schleicher—holding the rank of major—explained his political ambitions to other General Staff officers. First, he sought to restore Germany's governmental power and authority; in his view a strong *Reichspräsident* with a strong military. His second goal was the reconstruction of the economy. Finally he saw the need to reconstitute Germany's military power as instrument for foreign affairs. These political goals were strongly connected to the main threats for Germany that Schleicher perceived: left- and right-wing extremists as well as foreign powers. Therefore, a powerful and centralized German state was indispensable. All his following military and political activities focused on these views and ambitions.<sup>208</sup>

Hence, it is not surprising that Schleicher became more and more a soldier in politics, an effort made easier by the chaos of the post-war era. He was successful in perpetually increasing his influence in Germany's governmental affairs. His later

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<sup>205</sup> Hürter, *Wilhelm Groener*, 34–35.

<sup>206</sup> Deist, *The Wehrmacht*, 7.

<sup>207</sup> Hürter, *Wilhelm Groener*, 81. (Hindenburg, Groener und ... Schleicher wieder die maßgeblichen Persönlichkeiten der Obersten Heeresleitung von 1918/19 vereint waren.)

<sup>208</sup> Irene Strenge, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 16–20.

chancellorship was not an accident but the result of a long-term process. In November 1919, he—the desk-bound officer—started an assignment in Seeckt’s *Truppenamt*, and his fields of duty were domestic and politico-military affairs. It is remarkable that, as a consequence of the impact of total war on state and society, the German military thus implemented a department for domestic politics for the first time ever.<sup>209</sup>

In the following years, Schleicher enjoyed several significant career advances and promotions amid the struggle of the young republic to find its footing. From April 1922, he led the Group T 1 III, an independent department within the ministry of defense and responsible for political affairs,<sup>210</sup> and “[i]n 1923 he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel.”<sup>211</sup> This position changed Schleicher’s daily activities dramatically and allowed him access to the Weimar Republic’s elite circles. Performing tasks for Seeckt or the minister of defense, he gained access to the chancellor and to political party leaders.<sup>212</sup>

The result was a comprehensive picture and opinion concerning domestic political developments and the young democracy’s economic circumstances. With regard to the numerous revolts in post-war Germany, for instance, Schleicher wrote in an exposé of August 1924 that—in the republic’s first years—the military state of exception several times strengthened the authority of the *Reich* and, moreover, that it was an act of public welfare to support the general German weal.<sup>213</sup> Furthermore, Schleicher used the new function as platform to expand his political network as well as to promote his favor for conspiracy: “The ensuing years found Schleicher making the most of his contacts and indulging freely his penchant for intrigue.”<sup>214</sup> Both aspects played a key role during Schleicher’s ascent to chancellorship in the twilight of the republic.

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<sup>209</sup> Vogelsang, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 32–33.

<sup>210</sup> Streng, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 22.

<sup>211</sup> Halperin, *Germany Tried Democracy*, 409.

<sup>212</sup> Vogelsang, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 36.

<sup>213</sup> Streng, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 26–27.

<sup>214</sup> Halperin, *Germany Tried Democracy*, 409.

## 1. Schleicher Barges in Politics

The election of Hindenburg as president in 1925 brought further major changes in Germany's civil-military relations in general and in Schleicher's opportunities in particular. It was clear that the new, militarily experienced, president (*Feldmarschall-Präsident*) would pay more attention to military affairs than his predecessor Ebert who was a civilian politician. Hindenburg also changed the nature of constitutional and mass politics in Germany, lessening somewhat the sense of illegitimacy among those who scorned Weimar, which marred the first years of the new state.

In line with the military's change toward cooperation with the civilian government once Seeckt had vanished, Schleicher began immediately to barge into domestic political affairs. Therefore, the new course cannot be understood at all as a "change of the distinct anti-parliamentarian attitude of the armed forces. Schleicher's already in 1926 submitted plans for an authoritarian constitutional reform allowed to realize that the time of [the military's] abdication of direct interventions in domestic politics was going to end."<sup>215</sup>

After Seeckt left office, the military began broad activities in Germany's domestic political affairs. Indeed, its desire for a monarchy still existed, but the republic was accepted as a necessary evil. Schleicher sought a special relationship between the president and the *Reichswehr* while, at the same time, he strove to weaken the parliament and the political parties. He admitted that a return to a German monarchy was not realistic and wanted the soldiers loyally to serve the republic. However, Schleicher early focused on the military's role as the president's essential power source to maintain law and order. In his view, the constitution's Article 48 was an ideal instrument to counter all kinds of difficult political situations in Germany.<sup>216</sup> Moreover, Schleicher was not

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<sup>215</sup> Mommsen, *Aufstieg und Untergang der Republik von Weimar*, 254. (Änderung in der ausgeprägt antiparlamentarischen Haltung der Militärs. Bereits die 1926 unterbreiteten autoritären Verfassungsreformpläne Schleichers ließen erkennen, daß die Phase des Verzichts auf direkte innenpolitische Interventionen ihrem Ende entgegen ging.)

<sup>216</sup> Carl Schmitt and Erwin Jacoby had offered the theoretical background for Schleicher's thinking at a conference of German scholars of constitutional law in April 1924 (Mommsen, *Aufstieg und Untergang der Republik von Weimar*, 303).

concerned with regard to the form of government as such. His focus was exclusively to find a proper arrangement for the military within the given circumstances and guarantee its most possible influence in governmental affairs. It is not surprising that Schleicher demonstrated a glaring lack of the political neutrality that is essential for an army of a democratic state. Instead, he sought actively to keep the Social Democrats out of the cabinet, while he also supported right-wing political parties, which he viewed as sharing the interests of the army.<sup>217</sup>

## **2. Schleicher and Hindenburg**

In 1926, the German Minister of Defense Otto Gessler “established a new Armed Forces Section in the Defense Military, to assist him in liaison with the services, and to improve coordination between the Ministry and the Army and Navy Commands.”<sup>218</sup> He named Schleicher to the position. Schleicher, holding the rank Colonel, thus became the informal head of Germany’s politico-military affairs in the ministry (such as it was),<sup>219</sup> and, in fact, the defense minister’s political advisor.<sup>220</sup> This function as well as his excellent connections to the Hindenburg family enabled him to and steer German politics.

Through the *Reichspräsident’s* son “Oskar, who ... served as his father’s personal adjutant, Schleicher was able to gain admittance to the presidential palace at will.”<sup>221</sup> Schleicher made the most of his rising influence with Hindenburg, and in 1926/27 he suggested that the president should implement a nationalistically orientated government without involving the political parties. This advice was probably the first step for Hindenburg’s authoritarian presidential governance that he showed in the final years of the Weimar Republic.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Streng, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 43–47.

<sup>218</sup> Dupuy, *A Genius for War*, 220.

<sup>219</sup> Kolb, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 86–87.

<sup>220</sup> Streng, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 42.

<sup>221</sup> Halperin, *Germany Tried Democracy*, 409.

<sup>222</sup> Kolb, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 87.

### 3. Schleicher and Groener

The president developed the habit of appointing ministers himself.<sup>223</sup> When, in January 1928, the position of the minister of defense was vacant, Hindenburg sought a candidate with excellent military as well as political background. Ideally, this candidate would be an officer whom the president knew and trusted from World War I and who had no fear or reservations about conflict with the parliament. The president chose an officer who had several times demonstrated his unconditional loyalty and who had contributed to preserve Hindenburg's public reputation: Wilhelm Groener.<sup>224</sup>

In his inaugural address, Groener made clear that his sole focus was to serve Hindenburg faithfully; he gave no consideration to the political parties' concerns. Furthermore, he emphasized his unique function in the government that, in contrast to other cabinet posts, allowed him to work independently from party political or parliamentary influence, itself reflective of the weaknesses of democratic civil-military relations in this phase of the Republic.

Groener developed the attitude of a presidential minister of defense [*präsidialer Reichswehrminister*].<sup>225</sup> Similar to Schleicher, his major focus was to increase the political and military power of the *Reichswehr*, and "he was in complete agreement with Hindenburg and all the other old-line militarists. Like them, he dreamed of restoring the army to its former place in Germany [*sic*] society."<sup>226</sup> Schleicher was one of Groener's closest friends and "was, indeed, considered by the new Reichswehr Minister as his 'adopted son'."<sup>227</sup> In March 1928, Groener assigned to Schleicher "the newly created *Ministeramt* of the Reichswehr Ministry, a political liaison body between the armed services on the one side and the Reich ministries and the political parties on the other."<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Pyta, *Hindenburg*, 515.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 515–516.

<sup>225</sup> Hürter, *Wilhelm Groener*, 47.

<sup>226</sup> Halperin, *Germany Tried Democracy*, 357.

<sup>227</sup> Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 431.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

It is remarkable that the parliament aimed at manning the position with a civilian servant but Schleicher prevailed. Due to this new position, Major General Schleicher gained a status comparable to a *Staatesekretär*, (secretary of state), and, eventually he joined more meetings of the cabinet than the minister himself.<sup>229</sup> From now on, Schleicher was 100-percent a soldier in politics as the Republic was about to enter into a new period of turbulence.

Meanwhile, the international and economic environment that had allowed the Weimar Republic to gain strength ended in crisis. The collapse of the New York stock market in October 1929 and the following global economic crisis brought again severe suffering for the German population. Foreign loans to Germany were drawn-off, and the number of unemployed people increased from 1.3 million to more than 6 million in January 1933. The nation's industrial production faced a 40 percent reduction, and the German export shrank from 13.5 to 5.7 billion marks.<sup>230</sup> A radicalization of the population was the consequence. Groener and Schleicher were in fear of left- and right-wing political extremism and sought to increase the army's strength to 300,000, including militia elements, to suppress potential domestic revolts.<sup>231</sup>

In 1929/1930, the government broke apart, and Hindenburg declared the state of emergency referred to Article 48. From now on, the president began—amid significant influence by Schleicher<sup>232</sup>—to implement cabinets without accommodating the political parties' will, an undertaking that was ever more difficult granted the posture of parliament.<sup>233</sup> Eventually, in late March 1930, “the last cabinet of the Weimar Republic

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<sup>229</sup> Streng, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 54–55.

<sup>230</sup> Deutsches Historisches Museum, 1918–1933—“Die Weltwirtschaftskrise,” <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/weimar/industrie/wirtschaftskrise/>, accessed May 14, 2013.

<sup>231</sup> Streng, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 61.

<sup>232</sup> After it was foreseeable that the cabinet led by the Social Democratic chancellor Hermann Müller would collapse, Schleicher sought a candidate of his, Hindenburg's, and conservative circles' choice. At a dinner that Schleicher hosted in his domicile on 26 December 1929, he aimed at exploring if Heinrich Brüning, a member of the conservative Centrum Party, was willing to take office. In case of a potential denial—in the beginning, the candidate of choice showed reluctance—Schleicher was prepared to become chancellor himself. Brüning, however, finally accepted and introduced his cabinet on 1 April 1930 (*Ibid.*, 63).

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

to rely on parliamentary support was replaced by a presidential cabinet under Chancellor [Heinrich] Brüning, which, lacking majority support in parliament, was to rule by presidential decree.”<sup>234</sup> Without understanding the comprehensive dimensions and potential later consequences of their politics, Hindenburg and Schleicher began to carry Weimar Republic’s democracy to its grave.

### C. THE RISE OF THE NATIONALSOZIALISTISCHE DEUTSCHE ARBEITERPARTEI (NSDAP)

A speech that Hitler gave in March 1929 in Munich forced Groener and Schleicher to consider seriously the NSDAP and its political activities, where before, they had little time for a rabble-rousing former enlisted man with his Jew-baiting and social-leveling tendencies. In his speech, Hitler had criticized the *Reichswehr* as a protector of democratic-Marxist interests and its domestic role as potential police force in case of crisis. This role and responsibility of the military, however, was one of Schleicher’s core concerns, and he meant to keep Hitler’s supporters from infiltrating the army.<sup>235</sup> Initially, Groener and Schleicher actively suppressed the NSDAP’s influence within the Reichswehr, for instance through suspension of all employees who were party members from the military’s plants in July 1929. The defense minister and his major advisor perceived the Nazis as illegal and revolutionary.<sup>236</sup>

Hitler’s rising popularity—and volubility—demanded their attention. Both Groener and Schleicher were aware that Hitler’s demands to increase armament, to break free of the Treaty of Versailles’ chains, to politicize the military, as well as to keep left-wingers out of the army, were goals that many soldiers shared. Groener and Schleicher understood that this expanding radical movement with its anti-republican, nationalistic, and military-friendly behavior resonated with many officers, who had resentments

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<sup>234</sup> Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 54.

<sup>235</sup> Strengé, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 59–60.

<sup>236</sup> Hürter, *Wilhelm Groener*, 285–286.

against “the desk-bound generals in [the ministry of defense] in the Bendlerstraße and their spineless demeanor toward the republic... .”<sup>237</sup>

In 1930/1931 though, Groener and Schleicher—quite impressed by the movement’s nationalistic and military orientation—changed their mind and initiated the army’s cooperation with the NSDAP and its paramilitary wing, the SA, with respect to homeland defense and border protection issues. It was especially Schleicher who sought to tame the radical movement through the integration of NSDAP and SA in responsible functions. Eventually, he did not see that the Nazis had not given up their subversive goals, at all, but Hitler and his entourage had drawn a curtain of legality over their illegal purposes.<sup>238</sup> Schleicher’s strategy of taming and coopting the NSDAP and SA was based on a fatal misjudgment: “What men like Hindenburg ... and Schleicher failed to grasp was that there would be no place for themselves (except as tolerated hangers-on) in Hitler’s totalitarian Reich, that he was not a man with whom genuine co-operation was possible.”<sup>239</sup>

Groener, however—from October 1931 also in the function of provisional minister of the interior<sup>240</sup>—saw the rising threat that Hitler’s party posed to Germany’s constitutional order. Indeed, his double role complicated Groener’s activities significantly. For example, in January 1932—in the function as defense minister—he allowed the *Reichswehr* to hire NSDAP members and received—in his role as interior minister—severe critique by republican parliamentarians and representatives of several German states. These democrats complained that he did not put enough effort in antagonizing the Nazis. In contrast to Schleicher’s team, Groener’s more democratic advisors in the ministry of the interior convinced about the risk that the SA<sup>241</sup> and the SS

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<sup>237</sup> Hürter, *Wilhelm Groener*, 286. (die >Bürogenerale< in der Bendlerstraße und ihre >schlappe< Haltung gegenüber der Republik)

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 290–292.

<sup>239</sup> Ryder, *Twentieth-Century Germany*, 280.

<sup>240</sup> Groener did not show ambitions to act double-hatted, but Schleicher preferred that solution and convinced the minister and Hindenburg to agree (Strenge, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 84).

<sup>241</sup> In April 1932, Groener emphasized that the SA had a strength of 400,000 and that 90 percent of them were former communists. (Hürter, *Wilhelm Groener*, 340).



(Schutzstaffel) posed to Germany's order in general as well as to the army's status as primary executive instrument in particular.

In the first instance, Schleicher agreed with Groener's decision to prohibit the SA, but shortly after—expecting potential negative consequences for the taming strategy—he changed his opinion. The minister, however, was strong-willed, and the prohibition became effective in April 1932. A wave of outrage roiled among right-wing and nationalistic groups as the SA paraded without its brown shirts, and Hindenburg—who never really took a position on the SA ban—held Groener responsible for these domestic political repercussions.

Schleicher was shocked that his mentor had not followed his advice, flirted with a mental breakdown, and, eventually, initiated a campaign against the minister. The result was that the three generals' ties of friendship were destroyed abruptly. Hindenburg and Schleicher were openly opposed to Groener and, on 11 May 1932, Schleicher declared the general officers' threat of resignation in case the minister remained in office.<sup>242</sup> Ultimately—in an event fateful for the history of Germany and its weak democracy—Groener resigned and, on 1 June 1932, and Schleicher became minister of defense.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

On the occasion of a cabinet session on 9 September 1932, the defense minister frankly stated that it was he who was effectively in power in Germany.<sup>243</sup> Such hubris was an augur of catastrophe for his country and, in view of 30 June 1934, for Schleicher himself.

The general's ascent in the Weimar Republic's military as well as in its political affairs symbolizes a remarkable biography of disaster for an officer in politics as well as for the efficacy of an army in a democracy. From the vantage of the present, with the

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<sup>242</sup> Hürter, *Wilhelm Groener*, 330–350.

<sup>243</sup> Das Bundesarchiv, “Nr. 22—Der Bundesvorstand des Allgemeinen Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes an den Reichskanzler. 13. Dezember 1932 [Anlage 2.],” [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919–1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1\\_2/kap2\\_22/index.html](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919–1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1_2/kap2_22/index.html), accessed May 24, 2013.

knowledge of the tragedy this course of events wrought, his anti-democratic and anti-republican attitudes should have hampered him from gaining a major role within Germany's attempt to modernize the nation's politics. In the shaky democracies of interwar Central Europe in crisis, however, the strong man with militaristic inclinations appeared with unfortunate frequency on the political stage. It was Schleicher's fortune that he was the protégé of powerful old-school key players who could revive the influence that they used to have in imperial Germany to the new political circumstances. Schleicher's desires for the military's significant influence in political affairs as well as for authoritarian governance perfectly suited in these key players' perceptions.

Whereas, Hindenburg, Groener, and Seeckt just temporarily functioned in responsible positions of Weimar Germany, Schleicher was perpetually in charge. In the beginning, he acted as a background soldier in politics. Now, from June 1932 on, he was an official and legitimate member of the German government. His significant influence on the venerable president allowed him to manage the implementation of new ministers as well as of governments on the whole. He was driven by a huge hunger for power regardless of long-term ties of friendship. In doing so, Hindenburg and Schleicher were exclusively focused on potential conservative political constellations and candidates. Their heritage, education, and attitudes made them doubtless convinced that their political beliefs implied the best and promising for Germany's future. These soldiers in politics wanted a strong and powerful Germany so badly that, eventually, both became blind in their right eyes, maneuvered mistakenly, and Schleicher was the steersman.

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## VI. SCHLEICHER'S CHANCELLORSHIP PAVES THE WAY FOR HITLER

In June 1932, Hindenburg implemented a new government of men drawn from the right and made a seven-league step toward the junking of democracy. Its members were mainly conservative noblemen without political mandate.<sup>244</sup> A man of Schleicher's choice, "the Catholic Franz von Papen[,] became Chancellor—losing the support of his own Centre Party in the process,"<sup>245</sup> because Papen succeeded Brüning, a colleague and member of the same political party.<sup>246</sup> This hollowing out of the political center proved fateful.

Schleicher supported Papen for four major reasons: First, he mistakenly thought that Papen could be easily influenced and steered. Second, Papen was a friend of Hindenburg and the latter's son and would properly suit Schleicher's political network. Third, Papen could not count on a parliamentary majority and was an ideal candidate for governance according to Article 48, based on the powerful role of the president. Fourth, Papen's good connections with France offered the opportunity to improve the German-French relations and potentially enable a peaceful neighborhood.<sup>247</sup>

In the beginning of his chancellorship, Papen met Schleicher's expectations: "On 4 June the Reichstag was dissolved and new elections called for 31 July. The ban on the SA ... was lifted on 18 June, and despite the fact that the paramilitary organizations of the [communist] KPD were still outlawed, there was near civil war on the streets as Nazis and Communists engaged in violent battles."<sup>248</sup> Moreover, "[t]he alleged failure of the Prussian state police to control political violence—which had in effect been legalised

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<sup>244</sup> Deutsches Historisches Museum, "1879–1969—Franz von Papen, Politiker," <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/biografien/PapenFranz/>, accessed May 17, 2013.

<sup>245</sup> Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 60.

<sup>246</sup> As early as in 1925, Papen had lost its party's support significantly, because he had supported Hindenburg's election for president instead of the Centre Party's candidate Wilhelm Marx (Strenger, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 112).

<sup>247</sup> Strenger, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 111–113.

<sup>248</sup> Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 60.

[sic] by the Reich government, with its unleashing of the SA—provided the justification for a coup against the Prussian state government.”<sup>249</sup> With regard to Prussia—Germany’s largest state, led by the Social Democrats—conservative circles aimed at destroying the Prussian “republican fortress”<sup>250</sup> to eliminate potential resistance against the federal government’s monarchic-authoritarian restoration politics.<sup>251</sup> This so-called *Preußenschlag* “was applauded by [right-wing Foreign Minister Konstantin von] Neurath and Schleicher, the officer corps, and the bureaucracy.”<sup>252</sup>

Schleicher saw Papen as a useful tool to realize his political goals, but the minister of defense completely underestimated the chancellor’s skills. Papen used to be well involved and connected in Berlin’s elite circles. He had access to a group “that included Kurt von Schleicher. ... Within that group Papen was frequently addressed as “Fränzchen,” a playfully condescending diminutive.”<sup>253</sup> Papen, however, developed his own style and agenda: “The assertiveness that Papen began to display once he was in office therefore surprised and annoyed Schleicher. On one occasion, after talking with Chancellor von Papen on the telephone in his capacity as defense minister, the general turned to his aides and quipped ruefully: “What do you say about that, Fränzchen has discovered himself.””<sup>254</sup> In Schleicher’s view, it had been a major mistake to underestimate Papen. Therefore, it is not surprising that he resolved that Papen had to be replaced. At this moment, the general “had decided to move from behind the scenes to center stage.”<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 60.

<sup>250</sup> Eugen Kogon, “Lessons for Tomorrow,” in *The Path to Dictatorship 1918–1933 Ten Essays*, ed. Hajo Holborn, (New York: Pantheon Books, Division of Random House, 1972), 176.

<sup>251</sup> Deutsches Historisches Museum, “1918–1933—Der “Preußenschlag,” <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/weimar/innenpolitik/preussenschlag/>, accessed May 18, 2013.

<sup>252</sup> Post, *Weimar Foreign Policy*, 350.

<sup>253</sup> Henry Ashby Turner Jr., *Hitler’s Thirty Days to Power - January 1933* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 41.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 41–42.

<sup>255</sup> Orlow, *Weimar Prussia*, 221.

## A. SCHLEICHER'S COOPERATION WITH HITLER

Another man whose skills and goals Schleicher would severely underestimate and misunderstand was the leader of the NSDAP, Adolf Hitler. From spring 1932 on, several secret meetings between Schleicher and Hitler occurred, because the NSDAP and its paramilitary forces had become ever more prominent in Germany's politics—though they also posed a commensurate threat to the domestic order. Schleicher was convinced that he could weaken the Nazi movement and exploit it for his political goals.

Several of Schleicher's and Hitler's interests were similar, at least at first blush. They both agreed on the efficacy of dismissing Defense Minister Groener and Chancellor Brüning; emplacing Papen as chancellor; annulling the prohibition of the SA; dissolving the parliament as well as the scheduling of new *Reichstag* elections; and disempowering Prussia's government. They were anti-democratic as well as anti-republican, and they aspired to an authoritarian order. Concerning Papen's chancellorship, however, their differences were striking: Schleicher, on the one hand, wanted to use the marionette Papen to achieve his own political goals. Hitler, on the other hand, saw in Papen a weak intermediate chancellor whom he intended to replace soon.<sup>256</sup>

Schleicher's military technocratic mind did not anticipate Hitler's intentions and the fatal consequences of his own politics. He mistakenly believed that he was in control of the nation's future destiny and did not understand the terrific intentions behind the Nazis' façade: "[A]lthough Schleicher had talked with Hitler at length on several occasions, he had failed to notice that the Nazi leader was not an ordinary politician. It had escaped him that Hitler firmly believed not only that he alone possessed the correct formula for Germany's future but also that he could not fail because destiny was on his side."<sup>257</sup> Unintentionally, Schleicher's politics helped realize Hitler's vision of a unified *Volksgemeinschaft*—led by a totalitarian leader, the *Führer*, who would implement the nation's will despite social, confessional, and regional differences.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Streng, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 95–97.

<sup>257</sup> Turner, *Hitler's Thirty Days*, 87.

<sup>258</sup> Mommsen, *Aufstieg und Untergang der Republik von Weimar*, 595.

## B. TAKING OFFICE FROM FRANZ VON PAPEN

The *Reichstag* election on 31 July 1932 brought a major success for the NSADP but no absolute majority. Hitler immediately informed Schleicher that he was not willing anymore to tolerate Papen's chancellorship and demanded to build a new government under his leadership. Schleicher was willing to accept Hitler's chancellorship in early August 1932, but Hindenburg was reluctant. The president, on the one hand, appreciated the Nazi movement's potential contribution to fulfill one of his core wishes, a national restoration and the German people's unity in the *Volksgemeinschaft*. On the other hand, Hindenburg was concerned that Hitler—backed by a strong party movement—could decrease or even eliminate the president's power. At least in summer 1932, Hindenburg saw Hitler as inexperienced in governmental and administrative issues and, worse, as Austrian corporal who was not qualified to lead Germany's government.<sup>259</sup> As such, Hindenburg rejected Hitler's plan, and, from August 1932, the NSDAP embarked on a course of confrontation with Papen's cabinet.<sup>260</sup>

Papen could not implement a stable government, but he still had Hindenburg's backing. After a parliamentary no-confidence vote in September 1932 that Papen lost by 42 to 513 votes, Hitler's party fellow Hermann Göring, who functioned as *Reichspräsident* from 30 August 1932 on, undertook to manage the parliament's activities in favor of the NSDAP. Eventually, Papen's resounding defeat—unique in Germany's parliamentary history—sorely damaged his cabinet's prestige.<sup>261</sup> Therefore, Hindenburg and Papen had little choice other than to schedule new elections.

On 6 November 1932, the next *Reichstag* election followed to no particular effect. Although the NSADP faced significant losses, the Nazi party was by far the largest faction in parliament. The formation of a new government remained out of reach. Hindenburg and Papen favored the declaration of a state of emergency, including, if necessary, the forcible suppression of the political parties as well as political

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<sup>259</sup> Pyta, *Hindenburg*, 715–717.

<sup>260</sup> Kolb, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 143–144.

<sup>261</sup> Mommsen, *Aufstieg und Untergang der Republik von Weimar*, 569.

organizations. Minister of Defense Schleicher, however, declared that the *Reichswehr* was not able to counter domestic civil-war incidents—which were likely after the declaration of the state of emergency, especially by Nazi units—as well as potential foreign threats at Germany’s eastern border.<sup>262</sup> A confidant supported Schleicher’s view: Lt. Colonel Eugen Ott, a General Staff officer who served in the ministry of defense, presented to the cabinet an unrealistic, but appealing worst case scenario (*Planspiel Ott*) that showed the *Reichswehr*’s inability to counter a simultaneously occurrence of a SA revolt, a general strike, and a Polish attack.<sup>263</sup> Eventually, Papen—feeling betrayed by Schleicher’s denial to support the state of emergency—abdicated on 17 November 1932, and, on 3 December 1932, Schleicher took office as German chancellor.

### C. CORNERSTONES OF SCHLEICHER’S GOVERNMENT

When Schleicher became chancellor, Germany’s situation was turbulent and chaotic. Although some indications existed of a glimmer of economic improvement, millions of Germans were still unemployed. Political parties used this dire situation for actions that were often violent, especially when the NSDAP was involved. Schleicher understood that a stable and functioning government was essential to end this crisis. His plan was to form an alliance among the *Reichswehr*, labor unions, and youth fraternities, which would serve as well as to divide the Nazis. Moreover, Schleicher sought to integrate Georg Strasser, a top-level Nazi functionary with a *Freikorps* background, into his cabinet and to implement a sort of German fascism to weaken Hitler’s movement.<sup>264</sup>

#### 1. Schleicher’s Official and Secret Goals

Schleicher, like large parts of Germany’s bourgeois circles, preferred to exclude the raucous political parties from government and legislative power. At this juncture, the presidential cabinets provided a helpful platform to diminish the parties’ influence and their perception within the German public. It was Schleicher’s misinterpretation and

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<sup>262</sup> Kolb, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 146.

<sup>263</sup> Büttner, *Weimar—Die überforderte Republik*, 485.

<sup>264</sup> Haffner, *Von Bismarck zu Hitler*, 226–227.



failure that the major pillar of his political power, the *Reichswehr*, was too poor to formulate and to enforce national politics.<sup>265</sup>

In a broadcast address that he used as a sort of government declaration on 15 December 1932, Schleicher appeared conciliatory and even charming. It is noteworthy that he began his speech by shielding Hindenburg from criticism from the parliament's most senior member. Additionally, Schleicher closed with quote by Moltke, as typical of the era. In his address, the chancellor emphasized the military's essential role as the nation's primary school for growing a disciplined, sober, and comradely German youth. The Treaty of Versailles, however, prohibited conscription, and Schleicher underlined the significant contribution of the youth fraternities to soldierly virtue of Germany's young male population. Furthermore, he stated that the treaty violated the nation's right to gain equality to other major powers with regard to its military capabilities.

Despite these clear military references, the chancellor highlighted that his goal was not a military dictatorship; rather he aimed to gain broad support from the German population. The chancellor lavished most attention in his speech to his government's efforts to mitigate the suffering of the people, particularly his job-creation program.<sup>266</sup>

Chancellor Schleicher understood socialism and capitalism as dogmatic ideologies and claimed, instead, to represent a politics of pragmatism. This view, his employment program, as well as his goal of harmonization with labor unions caused skepticism among influential circles on the right. German industrialists and great land owners were concerned that a uniform-wearing socialist had gained power. Right-wingers accused Schleicher of endangering Germany's restoration that, heretofore, had been possible only through the strengthened nationalistic movement. These economic and

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<sup>265</sup> Wilhelm Deist, *Militär, Staat und Gesellschaft—Studien zur preußisch-deutschen Militärgeschichte* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1991), 405.

<sup>266</sup> Das Bundesarchiv, "Nr. 25 Rundfunkrede des Reichskanzlers vom 15. Dezember 1932," [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919–1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1\\_2/para2\\_25.html](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919–1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1_2/para2_25.html), accessed May 21, 2013.

political interest groups more and more saw Hitler and his NSDAP instead of Schleicher and the *Reichswehr* as the essential plebiscite for an anti-Marxian and anti-democratic Germany.<sup>267</sup>

Behind the scenes, Schleicher intensively prepared to save the system of presidential cabinets and, first and foremost, to prepare to implement the state of emergency according to Article 48. To do so, the chancellor needed to buy some time, because the required measures—for example military contingency plans to counter militant movements and governmental regulations to suppress the labor unions' influence to strikers—could not be finished until January 1933. All these preparations were executed in the utmost secrecy.<sup>268</sup>

## **2. The Failure of Georg Strasser and Schleicher's Querfront (Divide and Conquer) Strategy**

Schleicher wanted to weaken the NSDAP by dividing it into two parts, with the center of gravity on the socialist part. Therefore, he sought cooperation with Gregor Strasser, a rival of Hitler whose focus was an anti-capitalist, national-Bolshevik platform within the constellation of party interests. At a cabinet meeting on 7 December 1932, Schleicher emphasized his wrong conviction that the NSDAP would tolerate his government.<sup>269</sup> Four days earlier, Schleicher had invited Strasser to become vice-chancellor as well as Prussia's prime minister.<sup>270</sup>

In contrast to Hitler, who aimed at replacing Schleicher and leading a potential government, the pragmatic Strasser favored the NSDAP's governmental participation without the unrealistic claim to Nazi leadership. Strasser understood that the growing indications for a recovery of Germany's economy could weaken the radicalization of the nation's politics. Heavy NSDAP losses in municipal elections in Thuringia on

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<sup>267</sup> Kolb, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 148–149.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 147–148.

<sup>269</sup> Das Bundesarchiv, “Nr. 5—Ministerbesprechung vom 7. Dezember 1932, 11.45 Uhr – 2. Außerhalb der Tagesordnung: Politische Lage.,” [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1\\_2/kap2\\_5/para3\\_2.html](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1_2/kap2_5/para3_2.html), accessed May 24, 2013.

<sup>270</sup> Strenge, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 205.

4 December 1932 were a warning signal. In the wake of this seeming setback, Strasser unsuccessfully attempted to convince Hitler to end the party's all-or-nothing strategy and to join Schleicher's government. The NSDAP faced another of its severe internal crises. As usual, Hitler came out on top, and Strasser relinquished his party functions on 8 December 1932.<sup>271</sup> Strasser's failure spelled the end of Schleicher's *Querfront* strategy.

### 3. The Onslaught of the Interest Groups

Germany's cabinet records show that several interest groups significantly tried to influence Schleicher's politics in his eight weeks of chancellorship. Whether or not these interests coincided with Schleicher's political plans, the chancellor had to address them. Schleicher undertook to appease, assuage, or coopt many of them in an effort, ultimately futile, to win more support for his program.

Governmental documents show also intense claims for support by farmers, industrialists, merchants, labor unions, and so forth. Many German peasants were in difficult economic situations, and Schleicher promised to protect them from foreign (price) competition.<sup>272</sup> Hence, sufficient agrarian production for the German population and the farmers' interests were a major topic as well as international trade treaties; customs procedures; and such multiple concerns of industrialists as labor time and wages. Agrarian lobbyists blackmailed the government and, furthermore, could count on Hindenburg's sympathy. The NSDAP had significant support among the peasant population and publicly criticized Schleicher's economic policy. Industrialists blamed the chancellor in his too intensive focus on agriculture. Within weeks Schleicher lost the support of the powerful agrarian lobby, on the one hand, as well as of Germany's industrial head organizations, on the other hand.<sup>273</sup> Furthermore, the German artisans

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<sup>271</sup> Büttner, *Weimar—Die überforderte Republik*, 487.

<sup>272</sup> Das Bundesarchiv, "Nr. 25 Rundfunkrede des Reichskanzlers vom 15. Dezember 1932," [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1\\_2/para2\\_25.html](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1_2/para2_25.html), accessed May 21, 2013.

<sup>273</sup> Das Bundesarchiv, "Agrarpolitik versus Handelspolitik," [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1\\_1/para2\\_8.html](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1_1/para2_8.html), accessed May 22, 2013.

complained that the chancellor did not spend sufficient attention to their business and that the master manufacturers—traditionally bourgeois middle class people—might be politically radicalized.<sup>274</sup>

Schleicher faced an aggressive and harsh domestic political atmosphere. For instance, Walther R. Darré—head of the NSDAP agency for agrarian policy and leading member of the still small SS—criticized Schleicher with scorn in a letter dated 13 January 1933 as being hostile to Germany’s farmers and not willing to open Hindenburg’s eyes for 20th century requirements. Darré frankly blamed Schleicher as completely incapable.<sup>275</sup> Eventually, the German chancellor faced a broad lack of support and saw only one solution to ensure stable governance as well as law and order: the state of emergency.

#### **D. THE CHANCELLOR’S MAJOR GOAL: STATE OF EMERGENCY**

From the very beginning of his chancellorship, Schleicher saw “in the proclamation of [a] state of emergency the sole remaining way to save the presidential regime.”<sup>276</sup> This tactic would, among other things, postpone the new parliamentary elections, giving Schleicher a chance to stabilize his authoritarian government as well as the presidential cabinet system. At a meeting with his minister of justice and Bavaria’s prime minister on 10 December 1932, Schleicher did not rule out a state of emergency and even mentioned the idea that the German military might use heavy weapons to suppress potential revolts.<sup>277</sup> A state of emergency might have offered the unique chance

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<sup>274</sup> Das Bundesarchiv, “Nr. 39—Der Vorsitzende des Rheinischen Handwerkerbundes Esser an den Reichskanzler. 30. Dezember 1932,” [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1\\_2/para2\\_39.html](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1_2/para2_39.html), accessed May 22, 2013.

<sup>275</sup> Das Bundesarchiv, “Nr.53—Walther R. Darré an den Reichskanzler. München, 13. Januar 1933,” [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1\\_2/para2\\_53.html](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1_2/para2_53.html), accessed May 22, 2013.

<sup>276</sup> Kolb, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 147. (in der Proklamierung des Staatsnotstands den einzigen noch verbliebenen Weg zur Rettung des Präsidialregimes)

<sup>277</sup> Das Bundesarchiv, “Nr. 16—Vermerk über Besprechungen des Bayerischen Ministerpräsidenten mit dem Reichskanzler und dem Reichsjustizminister am 10. Dezember 1932,” [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1\\_2/kap2\\_16/index.html](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1_2/kap2_16/index.html), accessed May 22, 2013.

to overcome the severe political crisis, prevent Hitler, and later restore Weimar's republican democracy.<sup>278</sup> Schleicher, however, focused on maintaining the president's authoritarian power and illegal delay in scheduling new *Reichstag* elections instead of saving parliamentarianism.<sup>279</sup>

As a matter of law as well as of personal preference, Schleicher would not proclaim a state of emergency on his own authority. He needed political advocates and, especially, the president's approval. For his part, Hindenburg was more concerned about being impeached for breaching the constitution, so the president stalled. Politicians of SPD, Center Party, NSDAP, as well as the majority of labor unions and the press saw no cause for state of emergency in January 1933.<sup>280</sup> The head of the Center Party, Ludwig Kaas, wrote Schleicher that any further delay in calling the new elections would be unconstitutional and have political as well as judicial consequences.<sup>281</sup>

Then in January 1933,—for unknown reasons—Schleicher's relationship with Hindenburg's son Oskar dramatically degraded.<sup>282</sup> All of a sudden, Schleicher faced the withdrawal of the president's backing. Moreover, Hindenburg viewed Schleicher's machinations in getting Papen removed as an infringement on presidential authorities. Hindenburg sought an arrangement between the government and the parliament, including the acceptance of a cabinet by the NSDAP. Because Schleicher had failed to tame or to integrate the Nazi party, his fate was foreseeable. At the next session of the parliament—scheduled on 31 January 1933—his government would face the same rejection and most likely a no-confidence vote—as Papen and his ministers some weeks before.

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<sup>278</sup> Kolb, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 148.

<sup>279</sup> According to Article 25, the Weimar Republic's constitution scheduled reelection not later than 60 days after the *Reichstag* had been dissolved. (Deutsches Historisches Museum, "Die Verfassung des Deutschen Reichs vom 11. August 1919," <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/dokumente/verfassung/index.html>, accessed May 23, 2013.)

<sup>280</sup> Strenge, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 215.

<sup>281</sup> Das Bundesarchiv, "Nr. 70—Der Vorsitzende der Deutschen Zentrumsparlei Kaas an den Reichskanzler. 26. Januar 1933," [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1\\_2/para2\\_70.html](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1_2/para2_70.html), accessed May 23, 2013.

<sup>282</sup> Pyta, *Hindenburg*, 769–771.

On 23 January 1933, the decisive meeting between Hindenburg and Schleicher took place. On the one hand, the president announced his will to consider dissolving the *Reichstag*. On the other hand, he declared that he could not take the responsibility to delay the new elections and that—with regard to the state of emergency—the political parties' leaders should agree.<sup>283</sup> It was obvious that Schleicher's strategy had failed, and the two officers settled an emotional dispute. Notably, the intriguer Schleicher blamed Hindenburg for being conniving with respect to potential candidates who could replace the fortuneless chancellor.<sup>284</sup> Indeed, powerful circles had started activities that endangered Schleicher's political power, and the chancellor was aware of these developments.

#### **E. PAPEN AND HITLER DEFEAT SCHLEICHER**

Following its electoral setbacks in November 1932, the NSDAP staked its political “comeback” on the election in the German state of Lippe on 15 January 1933. “[S]ince it was one of the seventeen federal states, success there would not go unnoticed.”<sup>285</sup> At the same time, the party was running short on money, so it needed bang for its Mark in this election. Lippe was a minor state with a 95-percent Protestant population that lived mainly in rural areas. These preconditions were ideal for the Nazis. The NSDAP mounted an enormous propaganda campaign. The republican press published dismissive comments, but in the end, the Nazis garnered 39.6 percent of all votes in Lippe. In Hitler's view, the election marked an outstanding achievement. He continued to tell the story of the party's glorious triumph and renewed his claim for chancellorship.

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<sup>283</sup> Das Bundesarchiv, “Nr. 65—Niederschrift aus dem Büro des Reichspräsidenten über den Empfang des Reichskanzlers durch den Reichspräsidenten am 23. Januar 1933 [Vorgehen gegen den Reichstag],” [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919–1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1\\_2/kap2\\_65/para3\\_1.html](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919–1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1_2/kap2_65/para3_1.html), accessed May 23, 2013.

<sup>284</sup> Streng, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 215.

<sup>285</sup> Turner, *Hitler's Thirty Days*, 54.

Hitler also took further steps to diminish Strasser's role within the Nazi movement.<sup>286</sup> One day after the Lippe election, Hitler arranged a closed-door meeting of NSDAP regional leaders (*Gauleiter*). It was, characteristically, a three-hour tirade—discussion or voting were uncommon at these sessions. The main object of Hitler's vitriol was Strasser: "Now, unleashing the full fury of his anger against Strasser, he reviled the renegade as a traitor and accused him of numerous offenses going back many years."<sup>287</sup> Strasser, Schleicher's great and perhaps last hope, was washed up.

Meanwhile, Scheicher's most recent political victim, Franz von Papen—aiming to settle the score of Schleicher's intrigue against him—contributed directly and decisively to Hitler's ascent. Papen arranged a meeting with Hitler at the Cologne residence of the influential financier Kurt Freiherr von Schröder by which the Nazi party's leader could significantly increase his prestige.<sup>288</sup> Indeed, "[t]he Hitler-Papen meeting ... had momentous consequences, for it ended Hitler's political isolation."<sup>289</sup> Hitler and his party now were seen to be political players with staying power and sufficient social chops to represent a broader range of conservative and nationalist voters—formerly Schleicher's main supporters. Papen initiated various negotiations to integrate the NSDAP into the German government, and "[t]hese negotiations were initiated ... with support of heavy industry; later they received the support of ... Oskar von Hindenburg ... ."<sup>290</sup>

Hitler was aware of Papen's excellent connections to Hindenburg, and "[h]e now had an offer of alliance from a former chancellor whose politics in office had won him the admiration of influential conservative circles and the affection of the head of the state."<sup>291</sup> Tellingly, a "photographer had been sent to Cologne by a politically well-connected Berlin dentist whose practice included such diverse patients as former chancellor Heinrich Brüning, Gregor Strasser, and Schleicher. ... Upon receiving

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<sup>286</sup> Büttner, *Weimar—Die überforderte Republik*, 490–491.

<sup>287</sup> Turner, *Hitler's Thirty Days*, 67.

<sup>288</sup> Büttner, *Weimar—Die überforderte Republik*, 490–491.

<sup>289</sup> Turner, *Hitler's Thirty Days*, 45.

<sup>290</sup> Bracher, *The German Dictatorship*, 200.

<sup>291</sup> Turner, *Hitler's Thirty Days*, 45.

confirmation that the former chancellor [Papen] had met with Hitler, the dentist at once relayed the news to the *Tägliche Rundschau*, a Berlin newspaper sympathetic to Schleicher. He also sent a copy of the photograph of Papen to the chancellor.”<sup>292</sup>

To gain power as German chancellor, it was essential for any potential candidate to become Hindenburg’s favorite. Mainly managed by Papen, “intrigues and machinations in high places set in motion a campaign to convince the ageing president to appoint Hitler as Chancellor.”<sup>293</sup> Hindenburg had unofficially authorized steps and negotiations to replace Schleicher. The president sought to effect the political constellation that he favored: a strong government of national convergence. Papen successfully smoothed out the differences between the key players and could suggest a new government on 29 January 1933.<sup>294</sup>

It was Papen who believed “that, in order to include the Nazis, it would be necessary to offer Hitler the chancellorship.”<sup>295</sup> The president was reluctant to embrace a Chancellor Hitler, but “[t]hose pressurizing Hindenburg to take this move were of the view that, if Hitler and one or two other Nazis were included in a mixed cabinet, they would be effectively hemmed in and could be ‘tamed’ and manipulated.”<sup>296</sup> Moreover, his advisors convinced Hindenburg that Hitler, as a new chancellor, would have less power than his predecessor Schleicher—which meant a comparatively weaker chancellor and a comparatively stronger president.<sup>297</sup>

The point merits repetition here: None of these political efforts by and among the conservative leaders, which made Hitler’s rise to power possible, were meant to bolster the Weimar Republic’s democracy or even to take the population’s will into consideration. Their “idea was that the army, industrial and agrarian elites would be able

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<sup>292</sup> Turner, *Hitler’s Thirty Days*, 47.

<sup>293</sup> Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 62.

<sup>294</sup> Pyta, *Hindenburg*, 780.

<sup>295</sup> Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 63.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>297</sup> Büttner, *Weimar—Die überforderte Republik*, 496.



to benefit from and subvert Hitler's demagogic powers and mass support."<sup>298</sup> The plan, then—to the extent that there was one—was to preserve the basic aims of the conservative agenda while harnessing the electoral power of the National Socialists.

On 28 January 1933, Hindenburg received Schleicher, and the chancellor emphasized that only the dissolution of the *Reichstag* could prevent Hitler's chancellorship. Therefore, he said, a perpetuation of the presidential government was required. Hindenburg denied this request, and Schleicher and his cabinet stepped down.<sup>299</sup>

In the cabinet's session immediately before the chancellor met the president, Schleicher had expressed his belief that Hindenburg was still not willing to make Hitler chancellor.<sup>300</sup> He was thoroughly mistaken, and, "[o]n 30 January 1933, Adolf Hitler was, by fully constitutional means, offered the chancellorship of Germany ... ." <sup>301</sup> In the end, it was Hindenburg's decision that put the final nail in the coffin of Schleicher's political career—and with it the fate of the first German Republic and peace in Europe.

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<sup>298</sup> Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 63.

<sup>299</sup> Das Bundesarchiv, "Nr. 72—Niederschrift aus dem Büro des Reichspräsidenten über den Empfang des Reichskanzlers durch den Reichspräsidenten am 28. Januar 1933 [Verweigerung außerordentlicher Vollmachten für das Kabinett von Schleicher; Rücktritt des Kabinetts.]," [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1\\_2/kap2\\_72/index.html](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1_2/kap2_72/index.html), accessed May 24, 2013.

<sup>300</sup> Das Bundesarchiv, "Nr. 71—Ministerbesprechung vom 28. Januar 1933, 11.30 Uhr—1. Politische Lage," [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1\\_2/kap2\\_71/para3\\_1.html#Start](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1_2/kap2_71/para3_1.html#Start), accessed May 24, 2013.

<sup>301</sup> Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 63.

## **VII. CONCLUSION AND WARNINGS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

Kurt von Schleicher's story operates on several levels as concern civil-military relations and military professionalism in its encounter with mass politics. Chief among them is the epoch of total war and its impact on German soldiers and politics, whereby Schleicher is an extraordinary example of a politicized soldier with an authoritarian professional ethos who overestimated his capacity to make policy in the political world—for which, as history judges, he was totally ill equipped. The first German Republic failed to integrate soldiers into its constitutional ethos, while soldiers did their best to damage and finally to destroy this republic according to their twisted idea of professionalism and a perverted conception of pluralism with its legacy of the 19th century and Germany's defeat in 1918.

Without doubt, Schleicher acted in what he deemed to be the nation's best interest, and he tragically believed that the army—especially he himself and other General Staff officers in politics—knew the right solutions for Germany's challenges in times of crisis. Such behavior betrayed his own myopia vis-à-vis mass politics and soldierly virtue, a misimpression with the most tragic consequences.

### **A. SCHLEICHER'S RESPONSIBILITY**

Militarily socialized according to Moltke's ideal of the role and the superiority of the German General Staff, Schleicher was also significantly influenced by such developments as the industrialization that dramatically changed Germany's political, economic, and social circumstances. As a member of the middle class as well as of the military elite, Major Schleicher must have been shocked by the repercussions that occurred in Germany during and after World War I.

In the last months of 1932, before Hitler gained power in Berlin, Schleicher's political activities forced him to give up his behind-the-scenes role as a “grey eminence” political officer. In the final instance, Schleicher “owed his success to two things: an unusual talent for organization and intrigue; and the unfailing good-will of highly-placed

patrons.”<sup>302</sup> His lack of comprehensive political understanding of democracy and the threat posed by its enemies to the state as well as his blind belief in the need of authoritarian political power—specifically in the hands of the nation’s war hero Hindenburg—became instrumental in Germany’s 20th-century tragedy.

Schleicher’s personal tragedy was his complete isolation that he faced in his brief chancellorship. Without doubt, the political and economic challenges he had to tackle were enormous. Hindenburg, political parties, labor unions, powerful interest groups, his rival Papen, as well as the Nazi movement including its paramilitary units put incredible pressure on Schleicher’s politics. With respect to these circumstances, his failure is not surprising. Indeed, Schleicher was not a politician with a comprehensive understanding of the diversified political stage. He was a military technocrat, and the chancellor’s inability to balance the interests of all involved actors led within weeks to his political isolation.

Schleicher’s further shortcomings, however, were his affinity for intrigues; his dramatic misjudgment of Hitler and Papen; and his disloyalty toward mentors and confidants like Groener. The general misused his excellent connections—notably to the Hindenburg family—for his own and the *Reichswehr*’s interests. He could not accept the rules of democracy, plurality, and established political procedures. Schleicher might have been brilliant within politico-tactical manoeuvres, but his missing strategic understanding let him strand as politician. Concerning Hitler and Papen, he must have been alerted after both had met in Cologne. However, two weeks before Hitler became chancellor, Schleicher—at a cabinet meeting—clearly stated that it was not the Nazi leader’s goal to gain the chancellorship. Moreover, he still pinned his hopes on Strasser who already had lost the struggle about the Nazi party’s strategy against Hitler.<sup>303</sup>

Schleicher’s misunderstanding of Papen’s skills and goals paved the way for Hitler’s dictatorship. On the one hand, the general knew that Papen—functioning as

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<sup>302</sup> Halperin, *Germany Tried Democracy*, 408.

<sup>303</sup> Das Bundesarchiv, “Nr. 56—Ministerbesprechung vom 16. Januar 1933, 11.15 Uhr [Politische Lage.], [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1\\_2/kap2\\_56/para3\\_1.html](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/vsc/vsc1p/kap1_2/kap2_56/para3_1.html),” accessed May 30, 2013.

chancellor—was not a weak, little “Fränzchen” but indeed a fully formed and experienced “Franz” who was assertive and very well connected, especially to Hindenburg. On the other hand, Schleicher’s politics toward Papen turned his predecessor into one of the general’s most powerful enemies. This enemy was at least as versed in intrigue and conniving as Schleicher, and, eventually, Papen successfully convinced Hindenburg that Schleicher had to be replaced.

Then there was Schleicher’s split with Groener. Although his mentor was smarter and more experienced in politics, Schleicher saw himself as an equal. Indeed, even when he worked as Groener’s subordinate in the ministry of defense, Schleicher perceived himself more as a member of the cabinet and not simply as a major advisor.<sup>304</sup> This attitude made Schleicher disinclined to accept advice or acknowledge Groener’s expertise. In a moment of severe political crisis, both generals had different opinions about the potential prohibition of the SA and the SS, and Schleicher dispossessed his fatherly friend—and also started on the final stretch of his own demise, to say nothing of the catastrophe of the Third Reich.

Schleicher perpetually exceeded his authorities in his incapacity to balance the ends of statecraft, especially at a time of crisis with an overestimation of military virtue in mass politics. Eventually, he respected neither his minister’s authority and his superior instincts about the requirement to preclude the enemies of the republic from seizing the upper hand, nor the will and the concerns of Germany’s republican democrats. Moreover, he misused his access to Hindenburg for selfish activities and endeavored to increase his political power through intrigues.

## **B. CONSEQUENCES FOR GERMANY AND THE *BUNDESWEHR***

The military’s influence in Germany’s politics that arose after Bismarck’s dismissal in 1890 and lasted until 1945 as well as the tragic consequences affect the nation’s politics even in the 21st century. In the 1950s the Federal Republic of Germany faced heavy domestic demonstrations against its rearmament. The 1980s brought political

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<sup>304</sup> Strenge, *Kurt von Schleicher*, 94.

conflicts with regard to the deployment of U.S. nuclear missiles on German soil. Today, military celebrations in public are rare and arouse adamant opposition.

After two total wars on its own territory, millions of losses, broad destruction of cities, and the total collapse in 1945—including the loss of the status as great European power—Germany’s population carries a deep skepticism with regard to military engagements. The German military functions less as a common tool to enforce political interests than, for example, in France, Great Britain, or the United States. Berlin usually understands military engagements as *ultima ratio* and, therefore, demonstrates a reluctance to deploy the *Bundeswehr*. This attitude, however, might change somewhat, because some foreign partners claim for an increased role of Germany in international affairs and military engagements. It is notable that Germany’s contribution to operations of NATO of the European Union is already significant.

It is, furthermore, notable that the nation as we know it today has only existed since 1990. The German government, the population, as well as Germany’s neighbors have had to get used to an economic power with roughly 80 million people in the center of Europe. With regard to the military, there exist no aims to become a great power again.

The *Bundeswehr* is an army of the people comprehensively embedded in democracy and multilateralism. Germany follows an agenda of security based on prosperity and not on force of arms. Its soldiers are democratic citizens in uniform (*Staatsbürger in Uniform*) including a huge spectrum of guaranteed individual rights. The concept of *Innere Führung* is the “bedrock of democratic integration”<sup>305</sup> and ensures democratic procedures within the German forces. Nevertheless, the relationship between the German people and their military is uncommon. In contrast to the U.S. population, the Germans hardly take pride in their *Bundeswehr*. Germany’s former president Horst

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<sup>305</sup> Donald Abenheim and Carolyn Halladay, “Soldier and Politics in the United States: The Effects of the Long War,” in *Jahrbuch Innere Führung 2009—Die Rückkehr des Soldatischen*, ed. Uwe Hartmann, Claus von Rosen, and Christian Walther (Eschede: Hermann Mies-Verlag, 2009).

Köhler called the population's attitude toward the army "benign neglect."<sup>306</sup> The current minister of defense, Thomas de Maizière, seeks to increase the German society's appreciation of the soldiers' merits through implementing a governmental policy toward veterans, a word that used to be unusual in descriptions of former *Bundeswehr* soldiers.<sup>307</sup>

Politically, the *Bundeswehr* has been successfully integrated. Armored military activities require a political (civilian) decision by the German parliament (*Bundestag*). A civilian minister, supported by four civilian state secretaries, leads the forces as commander-in-chief, an authority that will be transferred to the chancellor in case of defense.<sup>308</sup> Moreover, currently five of the nine department heads in the ministry of defense are civil servants. Civilians also run large parts of the army's administration, budget affairs, as well as procurement programs. With respect to governmental affairs, the military has the role of an essential advisor and executer of political will, but the required decisions make civilian actors or institutions.

The ongoing German discussion about pros and cons of the purchase of armed drones is a notable example. On the one hand, the German Air Force (*Luftwaffe*) clearly sees the need of such weapon systems.<sup>309</sup> On the other hand, the nation faces a broad debate among politicians and scholars as well as in the media concerning potential long-term consequences of a general automation of war-fighting.

Today, Germany is to a large extent a pacifistic nation. Its geographic situation in the center of Europe—surrounded by partners and friends and without a real military

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<sup>306</sup> Horst Köhler, "Einsatz für Freiheit und Sicherheit," [http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Horst-Koehler/Reden/2005/10/20051010\\_Rede.html](http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Horst-Koehler/Reden/2005/10/20051010_Rede.html), accessed May 31, 2013.

<sup>307</sup> Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, "Minister liefert Definition des Veteranenbegriffs," [https://www.bmvg.de/portal/a/bmvg/!ut/p/c4/NYvBCsIwEET\\_aDdBPNSboRcRQbxovaVtCCvNpqybevHjTQ7OwDvMY\\_CJtew3il4ps1\\_wgcNEh\\_EDY9oivHKRukliprcGoZLw3j5zgClz0EYNrFQZxWsWWLPo0kwRqQZoxsHY3h1r\\_rHfbnd210tn9v3J3XBN6fgDY58QXg!!/](https://www.bmvg.de/portal/a/bmvg/!ut/p/c4/NYvBCsIwEET_aDdBPNSboRcRQbxovaVtCCvNpqybevHjTQ7OwDvMY_CJtew3il4ps1_wgcNEh_EDY9oivHKRukliprcGoZLw3j5zgClz0EYNrFQZxWsWWLPo0kwRqQZoxsHY3h1r_rHfbnd210tn9v3J3XBN6fgDY58QXg!!/), accessed May 31, 2013.

<sup>308</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, *Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Artikel 115a/b (Berlin: Deutscher Bundestag, 2012), 108–109.

<sup>309</sup> Tagesschau.de, "Die Kriegsführung verlagert sich in die Luft," <http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/drohnen104.html>, accessed May 31, 2013.

threat to the German territory (besides ballistic missiles)—significantly influences the nation's politico-military affairs. The historical context of Germany's attitude and perception of today, however, must not be underappreciated. The diversified, selfish, and eventually criminal political activities, in which the Prussian and the German General Staff was involved, caused a severe scar in Germany's civil-military relations as well as in the German people's minds. Without any doubt, Schleicher's tragic failure as soldier in politics is a major burden and warning with regard to civilian-military affairs in the 21st century.

### **C. OUTLOOK**

Democracy and its defenders at the highest echelons of power in the state can never be immune to crisis, and the shifts of power and violence that are inherent in the political realm. German strategic culture, including its expressions in defense institutions and military organizations, is the frequent butt of misunderstanding from NATO allies, whose attitude to the soldier in politics is far more cavalier, if not irresponsible, when compared to Germany. The story here forms an important foundation of the self-image and professional ethos of German soldiers and the civilians who are their political masters. One need have little worry that a German soldier, politicized by crisis and the legacy of war, would engineer a change of regime in Berlin as interpreted here, only then to perish in a gang land kind of mass killing as on 30 June 1934.

Such a thing may seem far-fetched today, but the crisis of democracy and prosperity that has seized Europe since the world depression of 2007 is a very real thing. The impact of an age of terror, irregular warfare and a revival of nationalist, terrorist, and other enemies of the established order casts a shadow over the merriment in Berlin's center. Today, hip, young pedestrians frolic with little regard to the misery and suffering that once resided in Berlin, most of which began with the hubris of soldiers who thought they were better politicians than all others, whose brief encounter with power ended under the muzzle blasts of men in black jackets for whom only violence was the highest calling. Nonetheless, this history is the warning about the soldier in politics in a time of crisis and the blindness that is often its most significant trait.

## APPENDIX A. THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC'S CABINETS<sup>310</sup>

Philipp Scheidemann	SPD	13 February to 20 June 1919
Gustav Bauer	SPD	21 June 1919 to 26 March 1920
Hermann Müller	SPD	27. March to 8 June 1920
Konstantin Fehrenbach	Center Party	25 June 1920 to 4 May 1921
Joseph Wirth	Center Party	10 May to 22 October 1921
Joseph Wirth	Center Party	26 October 14 November 1922
Wilhelm Cuno	Neutral	22 November 1922 to 12 August 1923
Gustav Stresemann	DVP <sup>311</sup>	13 August to 4 October 1923
Gustav Stresemann	DVP	6 October to 23 November 1923
Wilhelm Marx	Center Party	30 November 1923 to 26 May 1924
Wilhelm Marx	Center Party	3 June to 15 December 1924
Hans Luther	Neutral	15 January to 5 December 1925
Hans Luther	Neutral	20 January to 12 May 1926
Wilhelm Marx	Center Party	16 May to 17 December 1926
Wilhelm Marx	Center Party	29 January 1927 to 12 June 1928
Hermann Müller	SPD	28 June 1928 to 27 March 1930
Heinrich Brüning	Center Party	30 March 1930 to 7 October 1931
Heinrich Brüning	Center Party	9 October 1931 to 30 May 1932
Franz von Papen	Centre Party	1 June to 17 November 1932
Kurt von Schleicher	Neutral	3 December 1932 to 28 January 1933
Adolf Hitler	NSDAP	From 30 January 1933

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<sup>310</sup> Deutsches Historisches Museum, “1918–1933—Kabinette von 1919–1933,” <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/weimar/verfassung/kabinette/>, accessed May 27, 2013.

<sup>311</sup> Deutsche Volkspartei.



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**APPENDIX B. *REICHSTAG* ELECTIONS RESULTS OF THE  
NSDAP<sup>312</sup>**

4 May 1924	6,50 percent
7 December 1924	3,00
20 May 1928	2,60
14 September 1930	18,30
31 July 1932	37,30
6 November 1932	33,10
5 March 1933 <sup>313</sup>	43,90

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<sup>312</sup> Deutsches Historisches Museum, “Reichstagswahlen 1919–1933: NSDAP,” <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/objekte/statistik/waaaaa3/>, accessed May 15, 2013.

<sup>313</sup> Hitler German chancellor since 30 January 1933.

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## APPENDIX C. NUMBER OF UNEMPLOYED GERMANS<sup>314</sup>

1921	0.354 million
1922	0.213
1923	0.751
1924	0.978
1925	0.636
1926	2.010
1927	1.327
1928	1.368
1929	1.899
1930	3.076
1931	4.520
1932	5.575

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<sup>314</sup> Deutsches Historisches Museum, 1918–1933—“Arbeitslose von 1921–1939,” <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/objekte/statistik/arbeitsl1b/>, accessed May 27, 2013.

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## APPENDIX D. GERMANY'S FOREIGN TRADE<sup>315</sup>

	<b>Import</b> <b>(million Reichsmark)</b>	<b>Export</b> <b>(million Reichsmark)</b>
1925	12,362	9,290
1926	10,001	10,414
1927	14,228	10,801
1928	14,001	12,276
1929	13,447	13,483
1930	10,393	12,036
1931	6,727	9,599
1932	4,667	5,739

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<sup>315</sup> Deutsches Historisches Museum, "Außenhandel 1900–1938," <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/objekte/statistik/epauhand/index.html>, accessed May 27, 2013.

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